



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



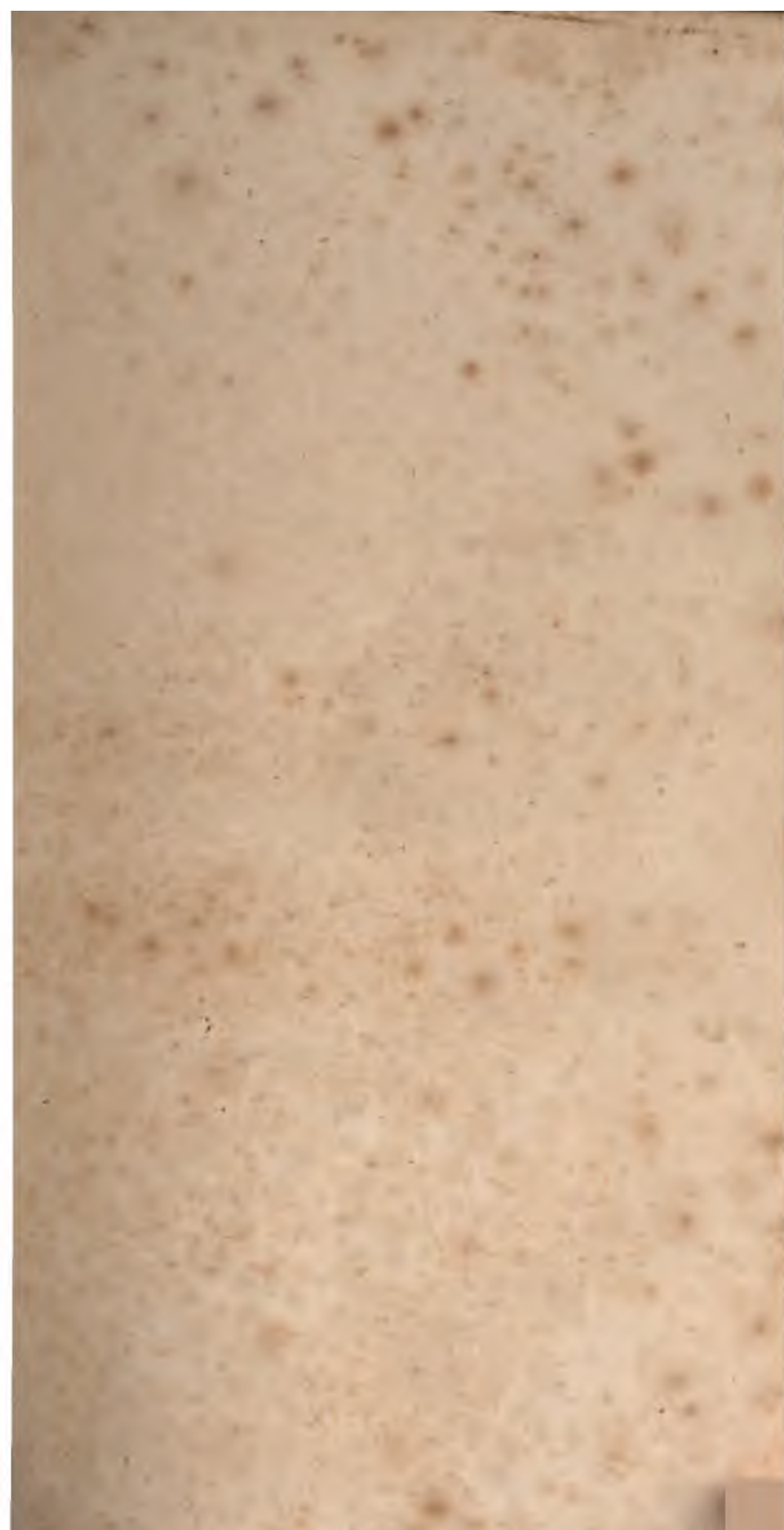


6000103860

32.

746.



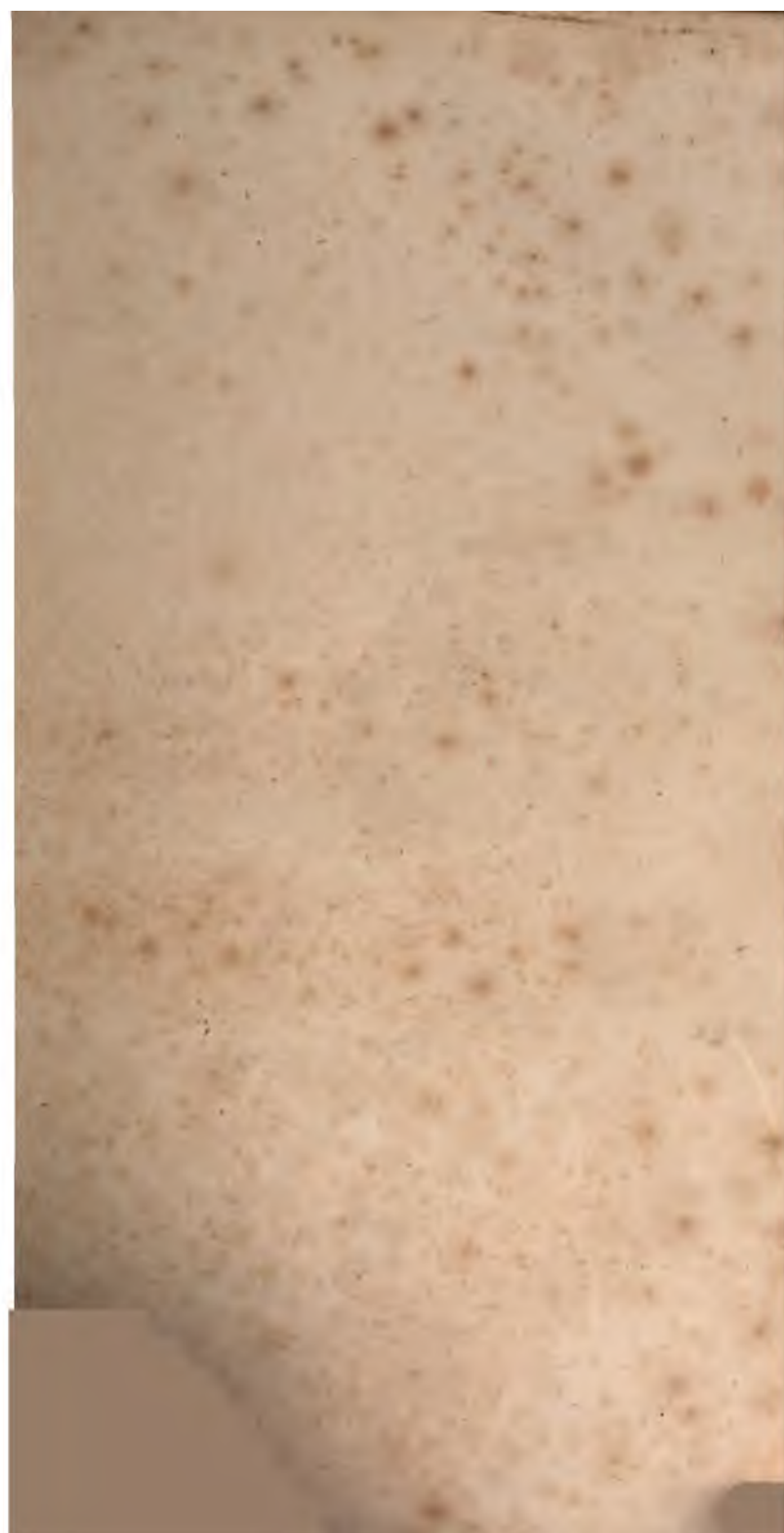




6000103860

32.

746.



LONDON :

R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD-STREET-MILL-

PREFACE.

My design, in the present volume, has been to supply a kind of manual, in regard to the effects of Christianity on the mind of its disciples, considered in the leading diversities of their character and circumstances. In prosecuting this object, I have endeavoured to distinguish between the real effects of the gospel, and those improperly attributed to it. An attempt is also made to shew that there is nothing in the acknowledged imperfections of Christians to furnish a valid objection against Christianity, nor against our anticipations as to the future greatness of believers. Their defects are in a process of removal; and their attainments have the seeds of a moral excellence in them which the future alone can fully develop.

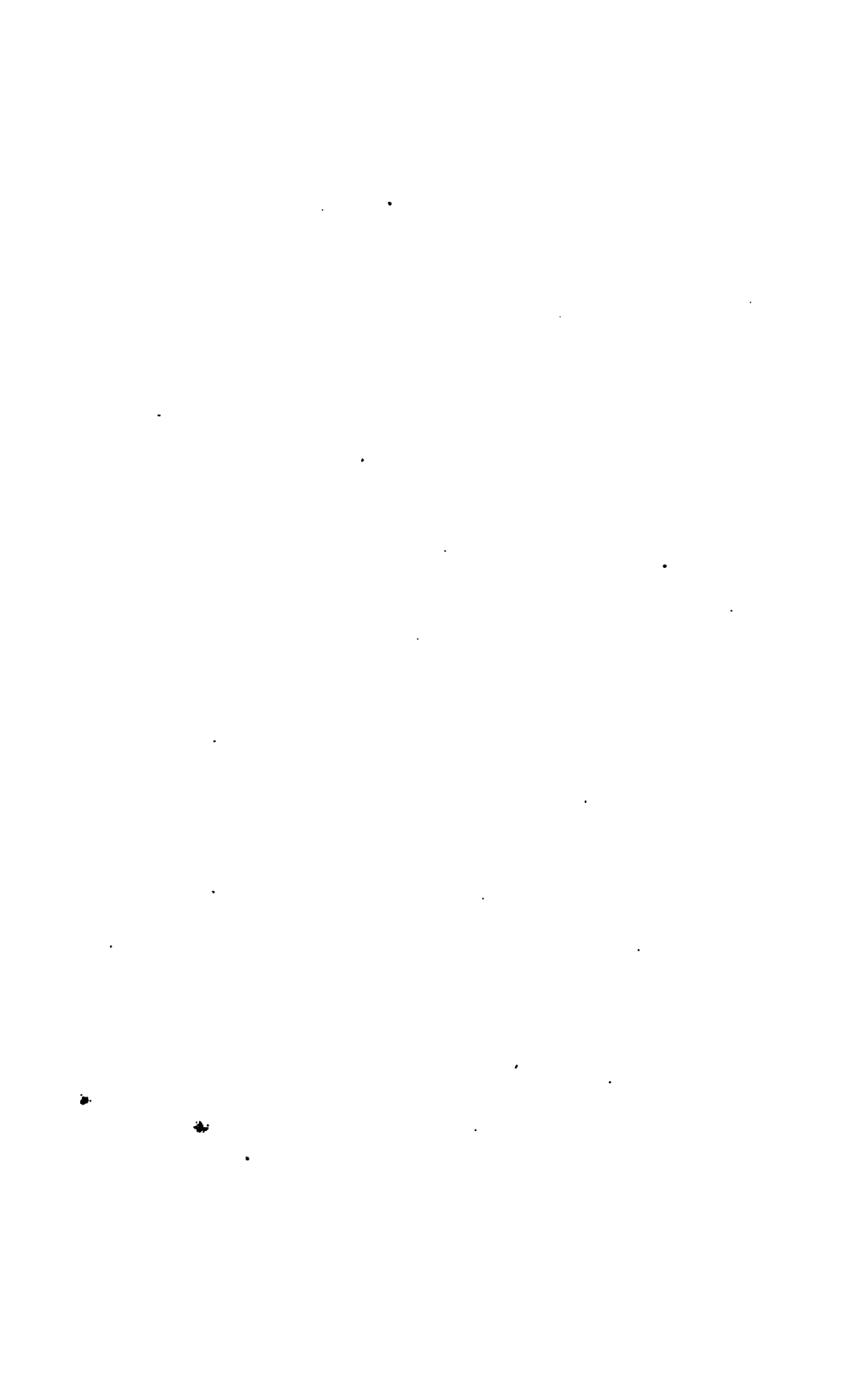


6000103860

32.

746.





THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE

ILLUSTRATED.

CHAP. I.

ON HUMAN DEPRAVITY.

————— Shall enmity and strife,
Falsehood and guile, be left to sow their seed ;
And the kind never perish ? Is the hope
Fallacious ; or shall righteousness obtain
A peaceable dominion, wide as earth,
And ne'er to fail ? —————
Almighty Lord, thy further grace impart !
And with that help the wonder shall be seen
Fulfilled, the hope accomplished ; and thy praise
Be sung with transport and unceasing joy.

WORDSWORTH.

THE injunction “know thyself,” was revered by heathen sages as fraught with the wisdom of inspiration. They were not insensible to the importance of this kind of knowledge, and they knew it to be of very difficult attainment. On earth, the individuals who aspire to the greatest good, generally impose upon themselves the greatest labour. In the matter now to be considered this is especially manifest. Men fail to know themselves, when they fail to become students for the purpose ; and it is only as their attention is concentrated on this point, that Wisdom is justified of her children.

But it is not from the oracles of heathenism that the true character of man may be learnt. Nor is this wisdom to be derived from the exercise of our own unaided thoughtfulness, however profound, or however ingenuous that thoughtfulness may be. It is reserved for the oracles of God fully to unveil the human heart. The book which alone reveals the full glory of the Almighty, can alone determine the extent of our obligations; and, as a consequence, the extent of that delinquency, or disorder which now pertains to us. It is the office, moreover, of the Divine Spirit, to give to the truth—the unwelcome truth—thus exhibited, the force of demonstration. The testimonies of heathenism corroborate the truth; they do not supply it. The view of human nature which they place before us is indeed a painful one, but it fails to present the darker and more appalling features of the reality. It is to the sacred scriptures, then, that our attention must be directed, if we would form a correct judgment with respect to the moral condition of our race; and with respect to ourselves, as parts of the whole. May the promised aids of the Holy Spirit be vouchsafed to us!—we shall then understand the things written for our learning. *The entrance of thy word giveth light.*

On this subject, there are two questions which seem to have special claim to consideration. What is the Extent of that Depravity which the attribute to mankind? And, what do

we know with regard to the Origin of this state of human nature ?

I. It is obvious that we live in an evil world ;— in a region where the lusts of the flesh and of the mind are constantly assuming all the possible forms of deception, ever practising their impositions on mankind, and not unfrequently on the individuals who indulge them. It is a scene where every man is more or less a deceiver and deceived ; and one, accordingly, in which every thing good must be exposed to danger, like a plant which has to contend against a soil and a climate not a little unfriendly to it. And the hazards to which every thing good is exposed on earth, will be found to result from the weakness of its friends, almost as much as from the enmities of its foes. The history of the church affords confirmation of this statement, which is but too abundant. There is scarcely a doctrine of the gospel which has not suffered as much from those who have received it in substance, as from those who have rejected it altogether. In some instances it has been softened down, or blended with partial error, so as to lose its true character and efficiency ; and in others it has been pushed to excess in an opposite direction, so as to produce a needless revolt both of the understanding and of the heart. Thus has it been with the doctrine of human depravity. While some men have abridged its meaning in a manner unauthorized

by scripture ; others have pushed a few particular texts so far, and have given them so wide an application, as to leave no very perceptible difference between the most amiable among unconverted men and an angel of darkness. It is not in the refinements of the former class, nor in the extravagance of the latter, that we discern the truth *as it is in Jesus*. It will be easy to shew, that the charge proved against the human race is one of awful and ruinous import, without supposing that men in general are convicted of all the evil to which the nature of fallen creatures may become subject.

It may be proper, therefore, to notice distinctly in this place, what is not meant by the scripture doctrine of human depravity. It is to be observed, that the sacred writers distinguish, very carefully, between the duties which have respect to man, and those which have respect to God—between what we may call the morality of social life, and the religion which prepares the spirits of men to enter upon the elevated intercourse, pursuits, and enjoyments of the heavenly world. It is not denied that the man who is devoid of true Christianity may possess much of the former. It is with regard to the latter only that every such person is declared to be wholly wanting. He may have the tenderness of a parent, the virtues of a friend, the generosity of a patriot, the charities of a philanthropist. He may spurn at dishonesty, he may loathe a lie. All the ties that bind him to his

family, his acquaintance, his country, and the human race, may be generally respected. He may be among the most forward to discountenance the vices which bring misery in their train, and to patronize the conduct, and the dispositions, which tend to the present welfare of individuals and of communities. Depraved as the world may be, these are among the things of which an apostle speaks as obtaining *a good report* in it. Its standard recognizes them as good, and has made them matters of commendation. The degree in which fruits of this nature may abound, and the elements of religious character, after all, be unattained, is disclosed in the case of the young ruler mentioned in the gospel. Nor can we look to our own neighbourhood, or connexions, without meeting with many similar examples. How many do we there see, who appear to want but one thing to make them all we could wish them to be! How painful is it, that this one deficiency should relate to the one thing needful! The young ruler preferred the possessions of earth to the treasures of heaven. Yet it is written, that *Jesus, looking on him, loved him*. And in our own day, where we mourn the absence of piety, are we not often bound to respect the presence of much moral worth? Nor should it be otherwise. Our prayer should be, that those who seem to approach so near to the kingdom of God, may be constrained to enter it.

When we read, therefore, that, in the days of

Noah, *the imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually*; and when we find the Israelites described by Isaiah, as resembling a body full of wounds and bruises, and having no soundness in it; and when we see this language employed to set forth the condition of the whole human race, in every age; it may fairly occur to us to inquire, whether this language was really meant to be applied in a manner so unrestricted. There certainly are grades of depravity among men who are alike without godliness; just as among the nations which encircled the promised land, some were more guilty, and reserved to a greater punishment than others, though all were sunk in the common guilt of heathenism.

Still, there must be a sense in which the strong language of scripture, in regard to the sinfulness of mankind, is manifestly just. It is affirmed of the human heart, in the most general view of it, that—*It is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*. It is written,—*There is none that doeth good, no not one, none that seek after God*. We shall discern the propriety of these expressions, if we bear in mind that the sacred writers, while conceding to the moralist the possession of his morality, point out its never-failing DEFECTIVENESS, and its INTERMIXTURES OF EVIL;—shewing, at the same time, that were the morality of such persons strictly perfect, it could at best be a part only, and much the SMALLER PART, of the obligation justly and necessarily resting upon us.

The morality of the worldly man, even in its most improved state, is an imperfect and sullied affair, if compared with that required in holy writ. The language of the divine law on this subject, not only prohibits the injury of our neighbour,—it enjoins that we love him :—love him as ourselves. And this it imposes as a constant obligation. In behalf of every child of Adam, and of every such nature through every moment of time, it demands this state of the affections ; and the manifestation of it, in all those ways in which it should discover itself. This is the state of social existence in that better dwelling-place where the will of God is the only law. This was its state in Paradise ; and only as we approach toward it now, do we begin to participate in the repose and the blessedness which are to constitute the future heritage of the faithful. Let the character of the most moral, the most humane of mankind, be weighed in this balance, and what has been done will appear little indeed in comparison with what remains undone. It may be ascertained, that he has conquered his selfishness in some instances ; but those in which it has conquered him, will be found to have been greatly more numerous and formidable. So far has he been from loving his neighbour—as *himself*.

We may add, that the mere moralist rarely extends his sense of duty toward others beyond the concerns of the body, and present life. He overlooks the mind in its relation to eternity :—the scene, where infinite good, or infinite evil is

awaiting it! Hence, it is not only true that he has done little with regard to the present interests of his fellow men, compared with what he should have done, but, that had he done every thing in this way, and left eternity unprovided for, it must all, ere long, prove as nothing. So comprehensive,—so like its great Parent, is the morality of holy scripture; and so restricted, so like that of a race lost to the due exercise of their noblest perceptions, and of their noblest sympathies, are the systems of duty with which men are satisfied. ✱

Defective, however, as this morality may be, it would be well if there were no more serious charge to be brought against it. It should never be forgotten, that we disclose a spirit of opposition to the will of the Most High, by declining the service which he enjoins, as certainly as by presuming to do what he has forbidden. But, passing over our sins of omission, in regard of what is due outwardly to man, the scriptures require the moralist to place his *motives* in the balances of the sanctuary, along with his actions. In the view of the gospel, it is not what a man *does* that determines his character: this depends, rather, on the state of mind from which his doings have proceeded. St. Paul assures us, that we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our body to be burned, as an act of charity, and yet be without charity. The apostle clearly supposes, that men may proceed to extremes of this nature, from motives of so little worth as to resemble sounding brass, or a tinkling

cymbal,—a thing of noise and emptiness. It is true, the better class of moralists contend, that men should add the realities of virtuous principle and feeling, to appearances of this kind;—that the actions which are good, should proceed from inward dispositions in keeping with them. Nevertheless, the imperfections we have noticed belong in practice to the best of these systems, leaving their best disciples guilty, in no small measure, concerning their brother.

Such men do not need be told, that the forms of religion may be very scrupulously observed, and that the whole object of the religionist may be to be seen of men. But it behoves these persons to remember, that this hypocrisy, which they have so often censured in pretenders to religion, mixes itself with the moralities of the world quite as much as with the observances of the church;—that there is a pride of moral character, as well as a pride of religious character, and that every character founded in pride, or in any other evil passion, is an abomination to the Lord. The requirement of the law is, that we should do to others as we would they should do to us; and that this should be done from a sincere love towards men, and in solemn deference to the authority of God. Now if we look from this broad rule to the conduct of the most scrupulous moralist, we see a few paltry fragments of obedience put into the place of the whole; and if we trace these fragments to their source, hard will it often be to discover a feeling that we may honour

as the sincere love of man, and harder still to find any thing approaching toward a due recognition of the authority of God. We see, on the contrary, that the appearances of benevolence frequently owe their existence to a refined calculating selfishness, and that the character of God, as revealed in the scriptures, is put far away.

It is not denied, then, that pride and vanity may sometimes lead to acts of what are called heroic virtue ; such as could not well be surpassed by the zeal of the most devoted professors of the gospel. But it is insisted, that there is scarcely a comparison to be made between the self-denial which, after all, terminates in some other form of selfishness, and that which springs mainly from a supreme solicitude for the honour of God. Before an observing eye there must be a peculiar complexion distinguishing what is done from this peculiarity of motive. There may be a mixture of what is laudable even with the pride of the proud, and with the vanity of the vain ; but such a state of mind includes a much stronger mixture of what is not laudable ; for it is no less true of the system of duty taught in scripture, than of its system of truth, that its design is to *hide pride from man*, so that he who would glory, must glory in the Lord.

We must now observe, that the scriptures which institute this severe scrutiny into the pretensions of men who endeavour to establish a righteousness of their own, very clearly teach, that were it possible that an individual should prove himself to have

been strictly faultless as to the claims of his brother, this could only secure an acquittal with respect to the minor branch of the charge preferred against him. He owes much to man, but more to his Maker. Man is his equal, his brother, and should be the object of an equal, a fraternal love. God is his superior, infinitely so; his benefactor to an infinite amount. To fail, therefore, with respect to what is due to God, is to fail as to his greatest obligation,—the great end of his existence.

Now man ~~has~~ not only failed on this point, but failed so entirely, and so awfully, that the strongest language employed in scripture to describe his sinfulness is evidently applicable to him. Even here, however, as in the former instance, we must exercise some thoughtfulness if we would distinguish between things that differ, and not mar the just impression of the truth by an over-statement of it.

When it is said that the carnal mind is enmity against God, it cannot be meant that there is *no* view of the divine Being which is not thus regarded by our unrenewed nature. It would seem unquestionable, that persons who have not been Christians, have felt a sincere admiration of certain perfections of the Godhead, as manifest in the systems of nature and providence. They have spoken of the heavens and the earth, the winter and the summer, as telling of the glory of the Deity. In the majesty, and beauty, and abundance of these, they have professed to see something of the greatness, and skill,

and goodness, of the Nature which has appointed them.

But there are views of the divine character in a great degree peculiar to the scriptures, and it is against these that the unchanged spirit never fails to evince a deadly opposition. Nature, indeed, has its host of difficulties, when viewed in connexion with any conception we may form as to the moral perfections of its author. But these are less explicit in their intimations, and less practical in their consequences, than those of revelation; and, accordingly, are more easily explained away, obscured, or forgotten. Were the jealous scrutiny, so often exercised upon the matters of the gospel, extended to the mysteries of providence, the difficulties of deism would soon be found to be more accumulated and weighty than those of Christianity. The God of nature would be even less acceptable than the God who speaks in holy writ, inasmuch, as deism has to do with all the evils now in the world, without the counteracting influence of that expedient of mercy which Christianity supplies.

Still, it is much easier to overlook the character of the Almighty, considered in his relation to the evil and the good, while gazing on the wonders of nature, or watching the course of providence, than while reading the Bible. And in proportion as this view of the Supreme Being is neglected, so as to leave the guilty little to apprehend, there is a kind of complacency which even the irreligious may feel with regard to the divine nature—or rather with

regard to what they suppose to be the divine nature. The *whole* of what may be known concerning the Creator, even from his works, is carefully avoided; and for the same reason that what may be known concerning him from scripture is avoided. The natural hope of all worldly, vicious, unteachable men is, that God may prove to be *such an one as themselves*; and he is the object of their approval, only when they find themselves capable of so regarding him. Nor is it doubtful that the boasted light of nature, in this respect, is commonly a mere delusion, adhered to as affording the best excuse for not attending to other claims which it would be inconvenient to admit.

God never meant that man should scale the heavens
 By strides of human wisdom, in his works
 Though wondrous: he commands us in his word
 To seek him rather, where his mercy shines.
 The mind, indeed, enlightened from above,
 Views him in all; ascribes to the grand cause
 The grand effect; acknowledges with joy
 His manner, and with rapture tastes his style.
 But never yet did philosophic tube,
 That brings the planets home into the eye
 Of Observation, and discovers, else
 Not visible, his family of worlds,
 Discover Him that rules them; such a veil
 Hangs over mortal eyes, blind from the birth,
 And dark in things divine. Full often too
 Our wayward intellect, the more we learn
 Of nature, overlooks her Author more;
 From instrumental causes proud to draw
 Conclusions retrograde, and mad mistake.

COWPER.

The perfections of Jehovah, as exhibited in the universe, are all before us in the gospel:—but in

the gospel is *the glory that excelleth*. From this source we know more of the holiness, the rectitude, and the truth of God, than could otherwise have been ascertained; and more of his goodness, and of his mercy. And every new disclosure of his excellence, in proportion as it is received, brings with it a more humbling conviction of our own depravity. His holiness is only another aspect of his benevolence,—his benevolence being that property of his nature of which every other is merely a modification. *God is love*. His law is holy, and he is the guardian of it. This follows, because the state of existence which it requires is essential to the order and happiness of the universe. His gospel is holy. It magnifies the law, and makes it honourable, by means of the great sacrifice which it proclaims; and its constant employment is in preparing a people, who shall, ere long, be presented before the throne above, having neither *spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing*. It speaks of the natural perfections of the Deity, but speaks of them, not only, or chiefly, as connected with the works of creation and providence, but, rather, as manifested in that work of redemption, which, whether considered in its origin, its means, or its results, is a work of unsullied holiness,—of supreme moral excellence.

Men are every where admonished of these things in scripture. It assures them that they are in a state of enmity against the holiness of the Divine Nature, and they confirm this alarming testimony

by rejecting it; and still more by rejecting the gospel, though exhibiting the only means by which they may be saved from the power and the consequences of their ungodliness. They are not subject to the law because it is holy, and they make light of the gospel for the same reason. It demands an abstraction from earthly things, to which they have no inclination, and a state of mind, with regard to the future and invisible, which they have no disposition to cherish. They have some idea, perhaps, of a state beyond the present: but it is a state of mere repose, or, at best, of intellectual pleasure, having no real connexion with those affections which the character of God, and the nature of his benefits, render imperative. It is not a region deriving its chief endearment from the perfected purity of those who dwell there; from the delight experienced in uttering the praise of God, in holy contemplation, in devout obedience. Such, however, is the heaven brought to light in the gospel; and the discipline by which believers are prepared to become partakers of it, is, in substance, what we mean by the christian warfare.

It follows, therefore, after every extenuating circumstance is fairly admitted, that man is, by nature, the foe of infinite excellence;—a rebel against infinite mercy. So lost is he to that love of God, and delight in his service, which constitute the happiness of perfect natures, that he is dead while he liveth; prayerless, instead of

being always prayerful; living without God in the world, instead of loving him with all his mind, and soul, and strength. There may be men, there may be communities, and even generations, who have sunk below the ordinary level of depravity; but all have come so far short of the glory of God, as to be reckoned dead in sin. Some traces of social virtue may still be perceptible among us; but to look for a due sense of religious obligation, or for the sympathies of the heavenly state in an unrenewed heart, is to seek the living among the dead. *Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity, they are altogether become filthy.* Yes, and in regard to that respect for the ties of social life, so often vaunted in some quarters, how much more manifest is the breach than the performance? It was the impression of such things that led the humane, the devout, the high-born soul of Cowper to exclaim,

O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more. My ear is pained,
My soul is sick, with every day's report
Of wrong and outrage, with which earth is filled.
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart,
It does not feel for man; the natural bond
Of brotherhood is severed as the flax,
That falls asunder at the touch of fire.

II. If such be the moral state of mankind, it is natural to ask WHENCE IT HAS ORIGINATED? The evil we have been reviewing, is one affecting the

men of all countries, and of all ages. Not a solitary exception has been found. Various schemes have been wrought out, and adopted, to account for this fact, without admitting that explanation of it which has generally been regarded as the doctrine of scripture. But in attempting to escape from one difficulty, which the All-wise has allowed to beset them, men have plunged into many and greater of their own creating.

Thus some have endeavoured to account for this state of things, by tracing it to evil instruction and bad examples. But it is natural to ask, whence came this abundance of pernicious teachers—this force of pernicious example? This is evidently a part of the *effect*, a main difficulty of the case itself, and nothing approaching toward a solution of our question. Beside which, the world has never been wholly without good instructors, nor without examples of the best kind; and still the age has never been, in which its people have not chosen darkness rather than light. Some, indeed, appear as partial exceptions, preferring the unseen and eternal to the seen and temporal. But these, with one consent acknowledge, that they were made to differ thus by supernatural means—by the grace of God.

One writer assures us, that the depraved state of mankind is to be ascribed to the circumstance that their animal propensities reach maturity sooner than the powers of the mind; and that having once gained an ascendancy, the force of habit enables

them to retain it. Another contends, that it is not this connexion between the soul and body that will explain the difficulty; and insists that the sinful condition of human nature is the manifest consequence of the relation subsisting between man and this world—a region where every thing conspires to demoralize him. Such is the general nature of the theories which are sometimes avowed on this subject, on the plea that the doctrine of original sin, which regards the fallen state of the human race as the result of Adam's transgression, is too hard to be received. But surely there is the same difficulty in supposing that man is ruined by the union between his body and his soul, or between his nature and this world, that is said to attend the doctrine of the fall of the human family in its first parents. If it be said that we were no parties to the sin of Adam, and ought not therefore to bear its consequences; it is equally certain that we were no parties to the union that subsists between the two parts of our nature, or between our nature and the present world. The objection, therefore, which lies against the doctrine of original sin, lies with at least equal weight against these schemes devised to preclude it.

Sometimes we are told, that the freedom of the will, which is necessary to a state of accountability, is the point which, properly understood, must remove much of the perplexity occasioned by the present condition of the world. Among the numberless inventions which have been employed for

the purpose of putting aside an unwelcome truth this is perhaps the weakest. If men were perfectly free to choose between religion and irreligion, whence is it that, left to themselves, they never make the better choice? Does not this uniform preference of the evil, shew that there is in human nature a deep and powerful tendency toward what is evil? We ever judge of an inclination from its effects. We conclude that the habitual drunkard is influenced by a strong propensity toward drunkenness. The stone launched into the air, descends to the earth. The stream bursting from the mountain's brow, seeks its passage toward the vale beneath. This is their tendency—their nature. And when the human will is found every where deciding in favour of worldliness, in some one or other of its forms, to the exclusion of religion, is it not plain that its boasted freedom is an idle fiction?—that there is a fatal bias in every man which enslaves it, that men are *sold under sin*?

Let it be remembered, also, that the means employed from the beginning, for the purpose of enlightening and saving men, have been of wonderful extent, variety, and fitness. Every thing adapted to reach the hopes and fears of men, their understanding and their heart, has been put into requisition to this end. Prophets have spoken with a voice from heaven. Miracles have attested the inspiration, and the importance of their theme. All the varieties of outward estate, and of intellectual or moral culture, on the part of the nations and the

tribes of men, have been consulted. But notwithstanding this abundance and amplitude so observable in the means of goodness, the history of the world is just that wretched picture which we have now to look back upon.

And how solemn the chastisements which have come upon us!—War, pestilence, famine, death,—and the ten thousand forms of suffering that lead to death. It must be presumed, that in the divine government, the punishment is never allowed to exceed the offence; and that the means are always adjusted to the end. It behoves us, therefore, to mark the causes which serve to render life a sickly dream, and death so bitter a reality; and to judge from these, though only the beginning of sorrows, as to the evil of that sin which brings them upon us,—the inveteracy of that disease which they are sent to expel.

But if the universality of suffering and death be admitted as proving a universal sinfulness, the suffering and death of infants must teach us that there is a kind of relation between them and the first transgressor, exposing us to some of the worst consequences of sin from the very commencement of our being. It is sometimes said, that infants become the victims of disease and death, simply as a punishment to their parents. But supposing no moral connexion to subsist between Adam and the infant portion of the human family, this is in fact to say that God sometimes afflicts, and actually destroys the innocent, as the only means of

chastening the guilty. But dare we suppose that he has permitted the existence of what it must thus be evident he cannot honourably controul? Dare we think that he has allowed an order of things to rise into being, the management of which must render it necessary that he should become the opposite of himself, the pattern of that evil which he has so solemnly proscribed? No,—*death is the wages of sin*, and its universality is decisive as to the universality of that taint which the term “sin” is employed to denote.

In brief, the doctrine of scripture on this important subject is,—that the human race are as one body, of which Adam is the head; just as the church is one body, of which Christ is the head. Adam fell, and all the members of his mystical nature fell with him. Christ is glorified, and all the members of his mystical body are reserved to a participation in that glory. This is the doctrine of scripture; and delivered by Paul with a plainness which should have precluded all doubt in relation to it. His statement is,—*That as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.* He adds moreover,—*That the law entered that the offence might abound*, or seem to do so, from its being more fully detected, and more loudly condemned. But he then triumphantly observes,—*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our*

Lord. We say not that there are no difficulties in this doctrine. It demands the submission of the finite to the Infinite. But we contend, that the man who rejects this view of things, must soon find himself encircled by others much more formidable. Could he banish the obnoxious doctrine of visiting the sins of the fathers, in any form, upon the children, from the Bible; it is obvious that no ingenuity can possibly separate it from the system of providence. In every nation, and in every age, children have been called to reap the fruit of parental delinquency, or to bear the consequence of sins on the part of their progenitors to which they were not themselves in the slightest degree consenting. Thus disease, reproach, poverty, and, to a great extent, even moral character, are manifestly hereditary. Thus nature confirms revelation; and both join to shut up the heterodox man to a denial of the divine agency in either, or to an acknowledgement of it in both.

There is doubtless a sense in which, *as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive*. This will not only be seen as true, in the event of the general resurrection, but in the decisions then to be proclaimed. Then it will appear, that the mediatorial work of the Redeemer has so intimate a reference to the manner in which sin has entered the world, by means of the first transgression, that among those who perish, none will be found who have not made their original depravity their own, by adding to it the guilt of actual trespasses. A

kind of justification has thus passed upon all flesh ; leaving the doom of every man to be determined, not so much by what was done on the part of his first parents, as by his own practical approval of their doings. He may speak of their ways as their folly, but, by becoming himself a sinner, he makes their example his own.

What the condition of mankind would have been, apart from the peculiar ground on which they are placed by the intervention of the work of Christ, is a speculation in which we need not indulge. Our great business should be, to avail ourselves of the best means of providing against the evils which actually press upon us, and not to waste our time or capacity in imagining circumstances that were not to exist, or in conceiving of remedies, and means of alleviation that were never to be needed. It would seem, however, to be unquestionable, that if our condemnation be a proceeding of strict equity, our redemption must be a matter of pure favour. If we have deserved to find our home in the abodes of darkness, we cannot have been entitled to a place in the realms of light. This may sound very like a truism, yet how much is included in it !

It may now be proper to ask, wherein is the difference between this view of human nature, and that generally entertained ? In endeavouring to ascertain the opinions of men with regard to this point, there are two classes which mainly arrest

our attention; and both are formidable, the one from its numbers, the other from the ability with which the materials necessary to form a judgment on the subject are collected and examined.

The first consists of that large division of persons who have learnt to consider the harmless man, especially if somewhat humane in his disposition, as being nearly every thing that should be expected from humanity; and who, were it not for such unseemly relations as are supplied by the Newgate calendar, the reports of battles, and the traffic in human flesh, would see comparatively little in the moral state of the world to affect them with disquietude. But the other class, with quite as little religion as the parties just adverted to, and, perhaps, with somewhat less amiableness, see in human nature a far different object of contemplation. Putting the thought of religious obligation altogether aside, they speak of the heart of man in terms as little flattering to it as could well be imagined. They have passed below the surface of human life, and have bent their attention on the working of the passions, and on the mysteries of motive, until, instead of concluding that what is good in effect must have been good in its cause, they have learnt to regard all effects with suspicion; so strong has their conviction become, as to the general viciousness both of the reasoning, and of the feeling, by which the actions of men are governed.

These persons, who may be described as

belonging to the school of Machiavel, Richelieu, or Rochefoucault, are not often troubled about the authority of scripture; but it is plain that they cannot very fairly quarrel with it on account of its lessons concerning the extent of human depravity. The philosophic infidel, or the reflecting man who should not perhaps be so designated, after all the indulgences which they may exclude from the catalogue of offences, cannot fail to look on the present condition of their species as one of almost indescribable turpitude and unhappiness. The imbecile may not see this, and may become quiescent Pharisees, as the consequence. But where there is most of the capableness of thinking, there will this painful truth be most fully admitted.

The Christian judges more meanly of the present state of human nature than the first of these classes, and not less so than the second. He thinks more meanly of it than the one, in consequence of holding larger views in regard to the extent of human obligation;—his more humbling conceptions, in reference to the present condition of man, being the natural effect of his more extended perceptions with respect to the unalterable glories of his Maker. It is this, also, which constrains him, even when candour and benevolent feeling have done their utmost, to admit the general truth of that severe estimate of human character which the shrewder class of worldly men have been compelled to form;—and to form,

without meaning it, in confirmation of scripture testimony.

But it must not be omitted, that these conclusions are connected in the mind of the Christian with views as to the original state of our nature, and its ultimate destiny, peculiar to himself. While gazing on it as a vast and awful ruin, he has the most impressive remembrances of its departed glory; and, with a feeling of triumph, can anticipate its restored greatness. The desolation of the present is all before him; but the past, and the future, lend something of their lights to dissipate its illusions, and to render the strange vision more affecting and hopeful. The interest felt in exploring the mouldering remains of ancient cities, is not derived from what the eye can rest upon; but, rather, from the memory of what is no longer seen. In the condition which has long been that of the professors of Judaism, there is little, considered in itself, to awaken sympathy. But how different the feeling with which these scattered outcasts are regarded, when we remember what their remote forefathers were, and what their descendants are yet to be! It is an interest of this kind which possesses the mind of the Christian, and is peculiar to him, when meditating amid the present ruins of humanity.

To this it may be objected, that Christianity, considered as a remedial scheme, has been but very partially applied; affording, accordingly, but a very partial relief under the gloom which

present appearances have so strong a tendency to produce. This, however, will not appear to be so great a difficulty if we regard the atonement made by the second Adam, as extending its efficacy to all who die in infancy, since these alone, constitute the majority of our race. Were it otherwise, the regret, or surprise, occasioned by the fact adverted to, ought not to favour any sceptical conclusion. Of the seeds scattered by the wind, each one of which, if falling in a proper soil, would supply a flower, a plant, or a tree, how great is the number which, from seeming accident, remain wholly fruitless? Of those which begin to vegetate, how many are destroyed in the bud, cut off in their spring-time, or otherwise prevented from reaching maturity? How often do the rains and snows, which come down from heaven, fall as an apparent waste? How many of nature's bounties spring up, and disappear, without answering any manifest purpose?

————— Such blessings Nature pours;
O'erstock'd mankind enjoy but half her stores;
In distant wilds, by human eyes unseen,
She rears her flowers, and spreads her velvet green;
Pure gurgling rills the lonely desert trace,
And waste their sweetness on the desert race.

YOUNG.

And as to natural remedies, or the means of counteracting disease, nature has always contained those which we now possess,—but how long were most of them undiscovered? By how small a section of the human family, even now, are they

adequately known? And how many are the contingencies that may serve to impair their efficiency, to render them useless, or even greatly injurious? It is the same with the mind. All men must be viewed as partaking, upon the whole, of the same capableness, with respect to the intelligence and the virtues which it is agreed to honour. But in these respects, how few are they who resemble the tree planted by rivers of water, bearing its fruit in its season?

Thus there is a frequent abortiveness, and a seeming partiality, in the whole system of things with which we connect the hand of the Deity, not at all less remarkable than are those which men frequently urge as an argument against Christianity. Indeed, to contend that if the means of salvation be sent to any, they should be sent equally to all, is to insist that we should all possess, not only a strict sameness of capacity, but a sameness of evidence, and of whatever else may possibly influence the decision of the mind with respect to the divine message. It is scarcely necessary to add, or rather to repeat, that the advantages of natural religion, in whatever they may be said to consist, are far from being placed under this kind of guardianship,—from being subject to this equal distribution.

CHAP. II.

ON JUSTIFICATION.

'Tis liberty of heart, derived from Heaven,
Bought with His blood who gave it to mankind,
And sealed with the same token. It is held
By charter, and that charter sanctioned sure
By th' unimpeachable and awful oath
And promise of a God. His other gifts
All bear the royal stamp, that speaks them his,
And are august; but this transcends them all.

COWPER.

It is no question of idle curiosity that will claim our attention in the present chapter. Its importance reduces all other questions to manifest insignificance. The solution of innumerable difficulties, with which reasoning mortals have been long perplexed, would be an acquisition of small value, compared with a satisfactory answer to the one question—*How shall man be just with God?* Our first object will be, to Explain the doctrine of justification as taught in scripture; we shall then notice certain important Inferences deducible from it.

I. The word justification is derived from proceedings in courts of judicature. It denotes the

acquittal of the innocent, as opposed to the condemnation of the guilty. It supposes A LAW, an ACCUSED PARTY, and A JUDGE. The law supposed in this case, is that great rule of the divine government, which, the Apostle assures us, is not destroyed but established, by the intervention of the gospel. The accused party may be found in every child of Adam. The judge is Jehovah himself—the sovereign of the universe.

In the first place, then, THERE IS A LAW IN FORCE WITH RESPECT TO US, THE NATURE OF WHICH SHOULD BE WELL UNDERSTOOD. The laws by which the universe is governed must all have proceeded from its Creator and Ruler. To determine what is proper to such a government, is reserved to his supreme wisdom; and to enforce it, is the province of his supreme power. Wherever he has bestowed a capableness of serving him, there a law or rule has been imparted, more or less immediately, for its guidance. By means of his will, as thus expressed, the whole of his intelligent creatures are divided into two classes—the obedient and the disobedient. The obedient dwell in heaven and are happy; the disobedient are on earth and in the regions of darkness, and are in a state the opposite of happiness,—some being sufferers to the extent of their sinfulness. This is the view of the divine government which occurs throughout the scriptures; and regarded thus generally, it commends itself to our ordinary notions of rectitude.

But the subject becomes much less acceptable to

the unrenewed mind when more closely examined. There is much in it to confound our boasted reason, and to humble our arrogant self-sufficiency. The law which the Almighty has imposed on his rational creatures consists of two parts; the first binding them to himself, the second binding them to each other. Something of the nature of this law we have explained in the preceding chapter. But it will be proper to repeat here, that what it requires, both with respect to God and to man, is not simply the utterance of right words, or the doing of right actions. This, indeed, it demands; but its authority extends beyond these, to the most secret thoughts and movements of the spirit. It enjoins an affectionate interest in the welfare of others, the equal of what we feel in our own; and it insists on a state of homage, both of the understanding and the heart, in reference to God, amounting to the full exercise of our mind, and soul, and strength. Were every outward indication of obedience never so punctually performed, and this state of the mind wanting, our condemnation by the divine law would be unavoidable. With the formation of a sinful purpose the law of God connects the guilt of an actual accomplishment. Jesus assures us, that he who looketh on a woman to lust after her, is already an adulterer, the sin being in his heart. It is the same with respect to every other trespass. The man who *would* commit it, is regarded as having done so. Thus the divine law is a rule, which not only determines what men should do or say,

acquittal of the innocent, as opposed to the condemnation of the guilty. It supposes A LAW, an ACCUSED PARTY, and A JUDGE. The law supposed in this case, is that great rule of the divine government, which, the Apostle assures us, is not destroyed but established, by the intervention of the gospel. The accused party may be found in every child of Adam. The judge is Jehovah himself—the sovereign of the universe.

In the first place, then, THERE IS A LAW IN FORCE WITH RESPECT TO US, THE NATURE OF WHICH SHOULD BE WELL UNDERSTOOD. The laws by which the universe is governed must all have proceeded from its Creator and Ruler. To determine what is proper to such a government, is reserved to his supreme wisdom ; and to enforce it, is the province of his supreme power. Wherever he has bestowed a capableness of serving him, there a law or rule has been imparted, more or less immediately, for its guidance. By means of his will, as thus expressed, the whole of his intelligent creatures are divided into two classes—the obedient and the disobedient. The obedient dwell in heaven and are happy ; the disobedient are on earth and in the regions of darkness, and are in a state the opposite of happiness,—some being sufferers to the extent of their sinfulness. This is the view of the divine government which occurs throughout the scriptures ; and regarded thus generally, it commends itself to our ordinary notions of rectitude.

But the subject becomes much less acceptable to

but what they should think or feel,—what they should *be*.

It should be distinctly noticed, also, that what the law thus requires, it requires **CONSTANTLY**. The dawn of reason within us, is the dawn of its authority; and through every step of life, until the mind has performed its last office in connexion with the body, it follows, demanding the ceaseless exercise of that benevolence which excludes all regard to our own interest at the cost of the interests of others, and the continuous manifestation of that piety which consecrates every faculty and every possession to the honour of God. The law contemplates the obligations of men as infinite and unchangeable; and, accordingly, the obedience which it demands is a perfect and uninterrupted obedience.

It is to be added, that the law which is thus broad and ceaseless in its claims, is enforced by **SANCTIONS** which are **IMMUTABLE** and **ETERNAL**. Every law must have its penalties attached to it. Without these, a requisition can have nothing of the authority of law. It becomes mere counsel or advice. It is by such means only that the laws of men operate as a terror to evil-doers; and become a protection and a praise to those who do well. What then is the language of the divine law in this respect? It is, *Do this and thou shalt live; the soul that sinneth shall die*. Where it finds a perfect obedience, it confers life; and where it detects the guilty, it only knows them to proclaim its condemnation of them. It is written, *Cursed is every one who abideth not in*

all things written in the book of the law to do them. Beyond the grave there is no change. *As the tree falls so it must lie.* There will, indeed, be a general resurrection; but it will be a resurrection of men in the character with which they left the world:—good or evil, *according to the deeds done in the body.* The habitations which will then open to receive them, will be according to their respective natures: the abodes of light or darkness—of ever-during light or ever-during darkness. Hence the words of Solomon,—*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.* Hence also the admonition of the Saviour,—*The night cometh, when no man can work.*

We now pass from this brief review of the law, to the case of those offending against it—THE ACCUSED PARTY. Justification, which supposes a formal trial, must also suppose that a charge has been preferred. It is accordingly written, that, *Whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God.* What, then, has man to plead in arrest of judgment? Is he not, beyond all question, guilty? Is there in him a single property of body or soul which sin has not tainted? Granting that it may not be said of some, with such manifest propriety as of others, *that the poison of asps is under their lips, that their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, that their eyes*

are full of adultery, that their feet are swift to shed blood,—yet whence, even in the case of these, are the angry passions so often indulged; and whence this absorbing solicitude about what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed? Whence this ever-weaning anxiety, as to a variety of earthly things; and, at the same time, so marked an unmindfulness of the word, the house, the service, the abode of the Eternal? Do not these things supply a direct contrast to the indications of that state of mind which the Searcher of hearts has demanded? And do they not leave all who are chargeable with them, in immediate exposure to the destruction threatened by his violated law?

A man may possibly persuade himself that the divine law, as we have now explained it, is much too spiritual, and severe, in its requirements, to be at all suited to the present state of human nature; and he may, in consequence, have learnt to suppose, that his deficiencies will not render him liable to the awful penalties we have noticed. But is there no mistake here? In what respect is the law too spiritual, or wherein consists its unrighteous severity? From its Author, we receive our natural life, the reason we exercise, and the affections which have their home within us; and there is nothing demanded of us beyond the employment of these properties, which we evidently possess, and possess from his hand, in a way that may be to his praise, and to our own well-being.

The obedience which the divine law requires from the reason and affection of men on earth, is strictly that which it obtains from the reason and affection of natures like our own in heaven. It appeals to the same capabilities, and a proper employment of these, according to the degree in which they are possessed, is the whole of its claim.

Nor should the amount of attachment to God and to man which is thus insisted on be matter of objection. It must be shewn that Jehovah is not the infinitely great and good, and that man has no means of knowing this, before it can be deemed safe to withhold from him, or from our fellow-men, the obedience which this rule has prescribed. While man shall continue to be what he is in relation to us, and while our obligations with respect to God shall be infinite, the utmost claim of the divine law must continue to be that of pure justice. A less amount of obedience, would be less than is necessarily due to the divine perfections; and less than is required to preserve that system of created happiness which the Creator has devised. It follows, accordingly, that an obedience less comprehensive, or less entire, could not be sanctioned by any law from Jehovah, as this would be to make him a patron, not only of the weakness, but of the sin of his creatures. In such a case, the all-just, and all-benevolent Monarch of the universe, would appear to be satisfied with less than is justly due to his own excellence, and with less than is strictly

necessary to the harmony and blessedness of his works.

What we want, is not a new law, for that which we possess is *holy, and just, and good*; and to be conformed to it, is to partake of its divine properties. Neither do we need any new faculties in ourselves, since we at present possess all that ever have been, or ever will be conferred upon human nature. These faculties, we admit, are now in an impaired state; but they are still within us, cast down it may be, but not destroyed. The whole difficulty therefore is a moral one, not a natural one; our sinfulness clearly resulting from the want of a better disposition, not from the want of other powers. The unregenerate mind is without holiness,—not because it is an impossible attainment, but simply because the heart has been given to its opposite, and has become enslaved in that direction. To ask is to receive, to seek is to find, and to knock is to have the door of a newness of life opened unto us. *But ye will not come unto me*, said Jesus, *that ye might have life*. This, therefore, *is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have chosen darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil*. These important scriptures, very plainly teach, that the want of an inclination toward goodness, though in a manner born with us, is a sin. By this it must be meant, that such a state of mind is ours, not so much from inherent depravity, as from deliberate indulgence,—the result, in

a greater degree, of our own agency, than of any thing done on the part of our progenitors. We may have been born in sin; but it has been our own act to nourish the seeds of evil into the fruits which bring forth death. And is this to be excused? The drunkard, who should labour to excuse his drunkenness, by urging that he has so long, and so fondly cherished the vicious habit, as to have made it a part of his nature, would labour in vain. The depredator, who should plead before his judge, that he has been so long habituated to plunder, as to find the temptations to it irresistible; would not thereby obtain a mitigated sentence. The wretch who may show that he has been so accustomed to idleness, and to its vices, as to have found it easier to hazard his life, by perpetrating the most atrocious crimes, than to return to the paths of honest occupation, is not spared on the ground of such a defence. It is the same with all the corrupt tendencies which habit has confirmed. The plea of custom may aggravate our condemnation, but can never lead to our acquittal.

Such then is the accused party:—and now there is THE JUDGE. With respect to him, it is important to remember, that he is one who may not be Deceived. Judges on earth, are often left to found their decision on mere circumstances, conflicting probabilities, or, at best, on the testimony of others. Not so this Judge. He has been with us in our down-sitting and our up-rising,

in our coming in and going out ; he has compassed all our paths, and known our thoughts even afar off. He is therefore said to have placed *our iniquities before him, our secret sins in the light of his countenance*. There they are, gathered together by his infinite knowledge,—not one of them is wanting. And there they are seen in all their dark and odious colours, from being placed before the full brightness of his excellencies who is glorious in holiness—so glorious, that he looketh upon the sun and it shineth not, on the heavens and they are not clean. On the day when the throne of this Judge shall be visibly set up, our sins will all meet us again ; and the circumstances which attended them, will all come forth with the freshness of yesterday.

As there is no room to found a hope of escape on the possible ignorance of the Judge, so neither is there the least ground to anticipate that he will exercise an unpromised clemency, or evince the shadow of a turning. On the contrary, it is certain, that the Judge who may not be Deceived, is one who cannot Change. Nothing can take place in connexion with the last judgment which has not been present with him from before the foundation of the world. And as the statements of scripture, relative to that day, were made with a distinct foresight of all possible occurrences, there is as much certainty in them at this hour, as there will be when the last prediction shall have received its accomplishment. Heaven and

earth may pass away, but one jot or tittle of what has been thus spoken shall in no wise fail. If the divine threatenings might fail, then the divine promises might fail; and the least suspicion, on this point, would be sufficient to destroy the foundations of happiness throughout the universe. God has required us to believe, that the most awful denunciations of his word will be realized in the doom of those who persist in doing evil,—and he cannot have required us to believe a lie. The view of his character and government which the scriptures place before us, will not fail to commend itself to him, and to all obedient natures, when the last fire shall be performing its work of desolation, and time shall be no more, as much as at this hour. And no less certain is it, that amid the wonderful revolutions which the ages of eternity may bring to pass, nothing can transpire to render the divine dispensation, in regard to this world, either less approved by the Creator, or less grateful to the creature—*He is a rock, his work is perfect, a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

Nor should it be overlooked, that the connexion between sin and suffering is evidently inwrought with the existing order of things; and that the occasional exceptions, sometimes so much magnified, only serve to confirm the doctrine which they are adduced to disprove. These instances all show the incompleteness, the unfinished character, of the present scene, and thus point to an

intimate moral connexion between a state that is, and a state that shall be.

Where, then, will the accused, convicted man discover a ground of hope? He may say, I will Repent, and make supplication to my Judge. But it must be remembered that to his being justified, it is necessary that he should be acquitted from all the charges brought against him as a sinner. The word justification implies nothing less than this. Repentance, however, is a confession that the charge of his having sinned is just; and the law, as we have seen, knows nothing of a sinner beyond the fact of his being such, and inevitably pronounces its curse upon him. Repentance, therefore, however sincere, however ingenuous, or deep, would be of no avail toward gaining a state of justification.

But the offender will not only repent. He will make the most costly Sacrifices to obtain the lost favour of God. He would offer thousands of rams, and rivers of oil, were they at his command, and were they still required. In the place of such services, he is, perhaps, resolved to abound in charitable works. He will become known as the protector of the defenceless, the benefactor of the needy. But it will still behove him to remember, that this is far from being the *whole* of the obedience required by his Maker's law, and that nothing short of an obedience commensurate with the whole claim of that law, can be the ground of that honourable acquittal which is meant by the word justification.

The sacrifices necessarily involved in becoming the support of the weak, and the friend of the destitute, may not be trivial. But were the penitent to add to these the many other privations of personal enjoyment, and all the inflictions of personal suffering, to which monks and hermits, and the superstitious in every age, have resorted, it would still be true that *if he say he has no sin, he deceives himself*; and if, on the other hand, he shall confess that he has sinned, the law prepares to inflict its doom upon him.

But the alarmed transgressor will perhaps do more than this. He will not only add to his repentance expansive charity, and to expansive charity much self-mortification and abasement;—he will attempt a sincere Reformation of his conduct and character. He will no longer be the same man. Suppose then, that in virtue of this resolve, he should become at once holy as an angel of God; and suppose this state of sanctity to be continued to the moment of his death. Still there are the sins of the past; and it behoved him as much to have been holy through the past, as it does to be so through the future. A life of perfectness during the space to come, would only meet the claims of the law upon him *for* that space; the deficiencies of the past, would still remain a matter of accusation against him. And every one must perceive, that the individual who owes ten talents, does not honour the demand of his creditor by the payment of five. He is a debtor still. And we should be still farther from admitting, that the fraudulent

deed of yesterday, may be obliterated by the barely honest action of to-day. Our case, however, is even more hopeless. It is evidently vain to expect, even for a moment, that the character of our future life will be what the law of God requires. On the contrary, added to the innumerable offences already chargeable upon us, will be the deficiencies and transgressions inseparable from every movement of our future course;—our best doings, instead of being confided in as an atonement for our worst, needing themselves to be repented of, because of their sinfulness.

Here, then, the question returns upon us with increased force,—*How shall man be just with God?* and again we ask of the convicted offender, where is thy hope? To trust in any of the expedients we have now adverted to, will be to lean upon a spider's web. You may repent, and with a bitterness of soul exceeding all that humanity has ever known; and still, as the law does not call for your repentance, does not accept your repentance, as it insists on that perfect obedience which must render all penitent feeling inappropriate, and even impossible, you must be found wanting. You may abound in works of charity; of you it may be said, that you are *eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor; that the cause which you knew not, you searched out; that you brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth*; and still, as the law does not allow the soul to be redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and

gold, nor admit of the costly performance of some duties, as superseding others, higher and more sacred,—you must be found wanting. You may expose yourself to much personal suffering; you may resort to self-inflicted tortures of a kind surpassing any thing that the sternest laws of superstition have required; and still, as the heaviest chain, the deepest dungeon, the most accumulated sufferings of the wretched on earth, are a sort of paradise when compared with the doom of the lost, with that torment the smoke of which ascendeth for ever and for ever,—you must be found wanting. You may purpose, you may even accomplish a reformation of character, outvieing every thing that man has wrought for himself; and still, as the law accepts not of future obedience as an atonement for the past, or of a part in the place of the whole,—you must be found wanting. Yes, and as every thing we know with respect to eternity, forbids the slightest thought of any second state of trial; the men who are found wanting, when they leave the earth, must be found for ever wanting. Trembling, perishing man!—there is an expedient, and one expedient only, by which your recovery to the forfeited favour of God may be secured!

The adorable Redeemer has magnified that law, both in its precept and its penalty, which we have so dishonoured. His obedience, as Jesus of Nazareth, and as the second Adam, included every thing that the divine precepts had claimed; and his sufferings equally testified his approval of the

consequences attached to transgression. Being holy; harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, his sufferings could not have been on his own account. But the Lord *laid on him the iniquity of us all*; and so much value did the greatness of his nature impart to the obedience which he perfected, and the suffering he endured, that by his stripes the perishing are healed—the lost are saved. The obedience of all flesh could not more have honoured the requisitions of the law, than did the Redeemer's solitary sanctity; and the everlasting destruction of offenders, could not have spoken more as to the justice of its penalties than did the affliction where-with it pleased the Lord to afflict Him in the day of his fierce anger. The precept must be good, since it is infinite excellence which appears on the earth to do it homage; the penalty also must be good, since it is the same excellence that becomes willingly exposed to it. If, therefore, men are saved from the condemnation of the law, it must be as an act of grace—of rich mercy, the only course prescribed by justice being their destruction.

It must be remembered, also, that this substitution, so adequate to all its purposes, has been made in a manner the most voluntary on the part of the Redeemer, and accepted in a manner the most satisfactory on the part of the Father. Hence a voice from heaven descends to the dwelling-place of man, saying, *Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom*. More plainly yet it speaks, telling us, that, *the blood of Jesus Christ*

cleanseth from all sin; and again, that, Jesus is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth. Accordingly, the message, the joyful sound of the Gospel, is as follows;—Men and brethren, be it known unto you, that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and that those who believe on him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.

The passage last cited speaks of pardon and justification as distinct blessings, and of both as bestowed on the believer. The difference between these should never be overlooked. Pardon supposes transgression, justification supposes the absence of transgression. Pardon is merely an exemption from the consequences of sinning; justification is an acquittal from the charge of having sinned, as well as from the punishment incurred by sin. There is all the dishonour of having offended in the case of man who is merely forgiven. There is all the dignity of an unsullied righteousness in the case of the man who is justified. Now the believer is not only pardoned; by means of the sacrifice and obedience of Jesus, he is justified. He is robed in the Redeemer's imputed righteousness; and, wonderful as it may seem, his ground of acceptance with God is thus made to be the same with that of his Great Surety. Who can meditate on this, and not marvel at it? The law of God, every perfection of the divine nature, every claim of the divine government, seemed to threaten the ruin of the

sinner,—yea, to render it inevitable ; and still, here is an arrangement which meets every claim on behalf of God, and every necessity on the part of man, procuring for the most flagrant culprit, availing himself of it, an acceptance, the same with HIS, of whom the Father is heard to say, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ! Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !*

II. There are three INFERENCES deducible from the doctrine now explained, which should be noticed.

In the first place, it is A DOCTRINE AFFORDING THE STRONGEST ENCOURAGEMENT TO FAITH AND HOPE, EVEN IN THE CASE OF THE MOST GUILTY. It is plain, that the justification of a sinner is an event not at all affected by the amount of offence with which an offender may be chargeable. The most vicious, and the least vicious, are alike condemned ; and if justified, must be justified alike, on the ground of another righteousness than their own. The degree of their depravity, might affect the degree of their punishment, should they perish ; but cannot in the least affect the manner or terms of their acceptance, if they are saved. In either case, their acquittal must be equally the work of God ; and, with him, a work of the same ease. Admit, then, all that can be urged against you, as to your great guilt :—that you have spent many years in sin ; that you have

sinned against the light of nature and of the Bible, against the strivings of the Spirit, against the monitions of conscience, and all the means of grace. Let it be that you have become to every good work reprobate, carnal, sensual, and devilish ! Even this, does not in the slightest degree embarrass the point of your justification, since that is not to depend in the least on the character that may have distinguished *your* life, but altogether on that of your *Surety*. As you believe on him, it is not toward *your* merits, but toward *his*, that the law directs the whole of its scrutiny. If it were not so, whence the justification of Manasseh, of Saul of Tarsus, of the debased Corinthians, of the men who with wicked hands crucified the Lord of life and glory ? These have all been *washed, and justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*. We repeat, therefore, that this doctrine affords the strongest encouragement to faith and hope, even in the case of the most guilty.

It should be observed in the next place, that a work so evidently begun and ending in God, must be free from the least touch of the imperfectness belonging to every thing with which fallen creatures are allowed to intermeddle. But it is, perhaps, more important to remark, that from what has passed before us, it is plain that the justification of believers is an act strictly IRREVOCABLE. The decisions of the Court of Heaven—and to that court this trial is restricted—are all regulated by consummate

knowledge. There, also, that Judge presides, who has no equal, and who cannot do wrong. Accordingly, the decrees there published are unalterable, all the sources of uncertainty and change being utterly excluded. Hence the triumphant appeal of the Apostle,—*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

It must be further observed, that the doctrine now explained, and which constitutes so prominent a theme of inspired scripture, MUST BE CONDUCTIVE, IN AN EMINENT DEGREE, TO THE HOLINESS AND HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO EMBRACE IT. Men do not look to Jesus Christ as a deliverer from the wrath to come, without perceiving the obligation of that law, which has exposed them to this penalty, and the necessity of that sacrifice, in which they profess to confide, as affording their only hope of escape from it. And the evil which sin is thus admitted to include, greatly exceeds what the most severe code of morals has ever taught. It is, in brief, to confess that our sins have deserved infinite punishment, and that the removal of them has required the intervention of an infinite sacrifice. The man who is sincere in such admissions, will not lightly become a flagrant transgressor. It is true, that as a believer, he is no longer *under the law, but under grace*. But shall he *live in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!* Though no longer under

the law, as a rule by which to work out his own acceptance, he is still under a law to Christ, as a rule by which to express his gratitude to the benefactor, who, by dying in his room, has saved him from destruction. And it must be remembered, that the same purpose which secures the perpetuity of the believer's acceptance before God, secures the perpetuity of holy principle and of holy affection in his soul. The person, therefore, who shall sin wilfully and habitually, whatever be his profession, will perish; not because he has thereby fallen from a state of justification, but because he has thereby shown that he had never attained to such a state. He is not a sanctified man, and this is the scriptural evidence of his not being a justified man; *for whom the Lord foreknew, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* These are all essential parts of the great salvation: and, in the nature of things, it must be so. The men who embrace the doctrine of justification by faith, have the most enlarged conceptions of the divine purity, and the deepest feeling of obligation to the divine goodness. They know, more certainly than other men, that, *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*; and they feel, more intensely than other men, that their whole nature should be a constant offering of devotedness to his glory. Where much is felt to have been forgiven, there will be much love. Where there is the greatest consciousness of benefits, we expect the greatest measure of obedience. And it is hardly

doubtful, that, in this fact, we have the great secret of the world's opposition to the doctrine of justification by faith. To admit the truth of this tenet, is to admit a claim on our obedience, so instantaneous and so powerful, as may not be evaded, without exposing ourselves to a painful conflict, occasioned by the pangs of self-reproach, and the terrors of coming wrath.

There may be men base enough to abuse this truth. But what has been the general character of its disciples? Who sustained the christian cause in the early ages of the church, when exposed, during several centuries, to the most subtle and powerful attacks from pagan persecutors?—The disciples of this doctrine. Who were the lights of the world, through the long night which followed from the fall of the Roman empire to the dawn of the Reformation, protesting, alike, against pagan and popish imposture, and doing it to the death?—The disciples of this doctrine. Who, when the days of reformation came, stood forth as the defenders of holy writ, braving all danger, to the jeopardy, and even to the loss of life, that they might restore to mankind the free use of their noblest possession?—The disciples of this doctrine. Who were the main instruments in perpetuating our own liberties, and our own religion, during the generations which followed upon that crisis, and when both were exposed to manifold peril?—The disciples of this doctrine. Who broke up the slumbers of our guilty land in the last century,

rekindling that flame of devotion which the return of the profligate Charles Stúart to our throne had almost extinguished?—We answer again,—The disciples of this doctrine. And again we must ask,—Who gave existence to the most powerful states of the New World, and were the donors there of those best of all gifts, a free government, and a pure Christianity?—Is not the answer nigh thee, even in thy mouth? And, above all, who have they been, who, in ancient times, or in modern times, have been every where derided as the pure, the precise, the sanctimonious, the righteous over-much; pointed at, as being of holier aim than their neighbours; railed at, as those who would shake both hemispheres with the voice of their cry, and by the energy of their labours, in what they regard as the cause of humanity, religion, and their God? We need not say who they are, who have been all this, who have endured, and done all this. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. By their fruit ye shall know them.*

CHAP. III.

ON SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES.

And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples, the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou knowest:—

What in me is dark
Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

MILTON.

It is a part of our faith as Christians, that there is an influence, or commerce, subsisting between the human mind in its present state, and minds which belong to other regions of existence. This interesting tenet is one of the greatest importance; and is not only clearly deducible from scripture, but derives support from some of the most obvious analogies of nature and providence, and from much in the general sentiments and practice of mankind. We shall first offer a few remarks, that may serve a little to illustrate the Reasonableness and Meaning of this doctrine; and, having noticed what is immediately taught in scripture with regard to it, we shall advert to certain Rules of inspired wisdom, by which it behoves us to *try the spirits*,

supposed to have influence over us, *whether they be of God.*

I. The works of God are distinguished by their variousness, and not unfrequently present the boldest contrasts. But these works, amid all their varieties, are capable of being classed, and may be placed in much of the order which we denote by the word system. There are certain links of sameness, connexion, and influence, which constitute their manifest relation to each other. Even those placed in strongest opposition, are thus made to unite, in some degree, by means of others, which intervene like the parts of a chain. Thus the vegetable kingdom approaches gradually toward the animal kingdom; and animals are allowed to become very nearly assimilated to the human species. And besides this perceptible approximation of the great departments of nature toward each other, there is a law of mutual dependence and contribution, if we may so speak, which pervades the whole,—each work of nature, depending for support on other works, and having to contribute to the support of others in return. It is not meant that they should stand alone or fall alone. The ocean cannot say to the land, I have no need of thee; nor the land to the ocean, I have no need of thee. Thus it is with the earth and heavens, the winter and summer; with the vegetable world, and the animal world; with the bodies of men, and with the minds that dwell in them.

Of elements,
 The grosser feeds the purer, earth the sea,
 Earth and the sea feed air, the air those fires
 Ethereal, and as lowest first the Moon;
 Whence in her visage round those spots, unpurged
 Vapours not yet into her substance turned.
 Nor doth the moon no nourishment exhale
 From her moist continent to higher orbs.
 The Sun, that light imparts to all, receives
 From all his alimantal recompense,
 In humid exhalations, and at even
 Sups with the Ocean.

Nor does the poet consider this ascending influence
 as terminating with the material, or the inanimate.

One Almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not depraved from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Endued with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and, in things that live, of life;
 But more refined, more spiritous, and pure,
 As nearer to Him placed, or nearer tending,
 Each in their several active spheres assigned,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportioned to each kind.

MILTON.

The universe is thus placed before us as a vast system of influence and association, ascending from one class of kindred objects to another,—passing from the earth to its productions, thence to all the creatures that live upon it, and still upwards to man, their chief, whose nature would seem to render him the obvious link between the material and the spiritual—earth and heaven. His soul,—his intellectual nature, has nothing strictly in common with it here. In its leading properties it stands altogether

apart, possessing an elevation of its own; and as we meditate on its transcendent capabilities, we feel constrained to look still higher,—to a world of spirits, as to its home. Thus the mind itself, and every thing in the great machinery of visible existence, harmonize with the doctrine of scripture, which not only teaches that there are spiritual natures beside our own, but that there is an actual commerce between those natures and ours—influences, both good and evil, constantly descending upon us from such sources, for the purpose of affecting our present character and future allotment. It assures us that the chain of connexion observable in the natural universe, is the resemblance of that which pervades the universe of rational beings, ascending from man to more exalted natures, and failing not until it has reached the noblest of those thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, who lay down their resplendent crowns, and prostrate all their greatness in the immediate presence of the Eternal! Thus it may be, that

Millions of spiritual natures walk the earth,
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep.

Reason suggests that our natural life is sustained by the divine hand, through the medium of visible means; and it testifies, no less distinctly, to the propriety of believing that the mind may be equally influenced from that same power, through the use of means suited to its nature:—in other words, that the God in whose hand our breath is, *holdeth our*

soul in life; and that he is at once the preserver of these frail bodies, and the guide and sanctifier of the fallen natures which inhabit them.

The judgment and sympathies of men, in regard to every thing religious, are deeply impaired; but the conclusions which follow from facts and reflections of the kind now adverted to, have commended themselves to the prevailing feeling of the human race, and have exerted a powerful influence over human action. We find men shrinking, as it were instinctively, from the thought of dwelling in a world abandoned to accident, or to itself. So strong has this feeling been, that where the views entertained of the Deity have been such as to preclude the supposition that all things are subject to his immediate influence, it has disposed the imagination to call a multitude of agencies into being, appointed, as delegates of the Supreme power, to the joint performance of this service. The objects and the changes in nature, have all been viewed by them as under this authorized guardianship, as was every thing that could affect the outward circumstances, or the intellectual and moral character of individuals and communities.

The lively Grecian, in a land of hills,
Rivers, and fertile plains, and sounding shores,
Under a cope of variegated sky,
Could find commodious place for every god,
Promptly received, as prodigally brought
From the surrounding countries—at the choice
Of all adventurers. With unrivalled skill,
As nicest observation furnished hints
For studious fancy, did his hand bestow

On fluent operations a fixed shape;
Metal or stone, idolatrously served.

And there is more of truth than may at first appear
in what follows.

And yet—triumphant o'er this pompous show
Of art, this palpable array of sense,
On every side encountered; in despite
Of the gross fictions, chanted in the streets
By wandering rhapsodists; and in contempt
Of doubt and bold denials hourly urged
Amid the wrangling schools—a SPIRIT hung,
Beautiful region! o'er thy towns and farms,
Statues, and temples, and memorial tombs,
And emanations were perceived; and acts
Of immortality, in Nature's course,
Exemplified by mysteries, that were felt
As bonds, on grave philosopher imposed
And armed warrior; and in every grove
A gay or pensive tenderness prevailed,
When piety more awful had relaxed.

*'Take, running River, take these locks of mine,—
Thus would the votary say—'this severed hair,
'My vow fulfilling, do I here present,
'Thankful for my beloved child's return.
'Thy banks, Cephissus, he again hath trod,
'Thy murmurs heard, and drunk the crystal lymph,
'With which thou dost refresh the thirsty lip,
'And moisten all day long these flowery fields!'*
And, doubtless, sometimes, when the hair was shed
Upon the flowing stream, a thought arose
Of Life continuous, Being unimpaired.

WORDSWORTH.

Certain it is, that the history of the world might be
appealed to as demonstrating, that the doctrine of a
divine influence, and of that influence as extending
to our ordinary affairs, and to the inmost secrecies
of the mind, is a conclusion sustained by the most
prevalent convictions of the human understanding,
and by some of the strongest sympathies of the

human heart. Whatever some solitary faction, in its moments of delirium, may have done, no nation has hitherto agreed to proscribe the belief of a divine presence and power in the earth; though few, unhappily, have been prepared to recognize that All-perfect Nature, whose word forms our only certain guide on matters of such high import.

The sum of the preceding statement is, that there is enough, in the relations pervading all material things, and in the evident feeling of mankind on this subject, to render our belief in the doctrine which teaches that the spirits of men are exposed to influences from other spiritual natures, manifestly reasonable,—so much so, as to make a hasty rejection of what is taught in scripture on this point, the certain indication, either of a pitiable weakness and presumption, or of alarming depravity.

Such men may say, *The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.* But what saith the voice of the Holy One, and the voice of nature too? *Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.* But the vanity of supposing that God has resigned his place of influence in the affairs, or in the hearts of men, is hardly greater than that of supposing that our spirits are

the only reasoning creatures in the wide field of creation, or than to deem it incredible that such natures, whether inferior to our own or superior to it, should possess a medium of approach to our faculties—our thoughts, imagination, and passions.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. The immediate reference of this passage is to the influence of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. But this is not the only spiritual influence connected with our present experience; and the language of the Saviour, in this instance, is applicable to all spiritual agency. We may hear the sound of the passing air, we may feel its pressure; but as to the cause of these sensations, we know not whence it comes nor whither it goes. We are conscious of the fact, but ignorant of the mode. We partake of the effect, but have a very imperfect knowledge of the concurrence of things by which it is produced. *So is every one who is born of the Spirit*, or at all influenced by purely spiritual causes. The air, which produces great and unquestionable results, and still eludes the sight, is thus employed to denote the effects of spiritual power among us, and to teach us, that our inability to comprehend much connected with the working of such power, ought not to form the slightest objection to its reality.

The whispering air
Sends inspiration from the shadowy heights,
And blind recesses of the caverned rocks.

What is thus said of the air, might be said of many influences in nature. We know that they exist, but *how*, or *wherefore*, are questions still to be answered. It is not the Bible only which has its appointment to prophesy in part, nor is it merely with respect to the more mysterious doctrines of the Bible that we know only in part.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the word *spirit*, is of the same meaning with the word air. It appears to have been applied to the mind, from its seeming dependence on our respiration for its connexion with the body. Through the imperfections of human language, the term has been thus accommodated in every age and nation; and is to be understood as referring to a reasoning spiritual existence, with all the usual properties of such an existence, both in distinction from the inanimate things surrounding us, and from the mere instinct of the brute.

II. We shall now proceed to notice, more particularly, WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH ON this theme. The sacred writers affirm, that the chain of created existence does not terminate with man;—that as there are existences greatly below him, so there are others rising above him. Even in his perfect state, he was made “lower” than the angels. How much lower he is now become we may only conjecture. But these angels have not all continued in their perfectness. Some of them appear to have fallen as far below humanity,

by reason of their sinfulness, as they were once superior to it. They became disaffected to the Majesty of Heaven; made war upon his throne; and were driven from the regions of light, to the outer darkness prepared for them. Of this revolt there was a memorable leader, who still possesses a kind of sovereignty; one whose

——— countenance, as the morning star that guides
The starry flock, allured them, and with lies
Drew after him the third part of heaven's host.

The legions of apostate spirits who obeyed his voice during the war in heaven, obey him still. He is their prince, and to his throne they have transferred the allegiance due to the Creator. By the agency of this great adversary, the fall of man was accomplished; and throughout the scriptures he is described as pursuing men with malignant hate, because the workmanship of God, and as ever hating them the more, the more they partake of a resemblance to their Maker. The manner in which this always active enemy of God, and of our race, is spoken of, demonstrates his personality. To question this is to destroy all the certainties of language, and not only to deprive the sacred writers of the commanding endowments which we expect should distinguish inspired men, but to deny them the lowest attributes of common sense.

This being, variously described as Apollyon, the Devil, and Satan, is said to be continually about our path, watching, and laying snares, that we

may become entangled with evil, and fall, and perish. Thus did he compass the way of Job, that he might perplex it; thus did he watch the heart of Peter, and wound it; thus did he beset the heart of Judas, and entered into it; and thus, as the prince of the power of the air, he works in the children of disobedience. Hence the many exhortations in scripture to watchfulness and prayer, that we may not become enthralled by the devices of this enemy through ignorance of them. The senses, the passions, the imagination, the intellect, all are avenues of approach in the warfare which he maintains against us. And fearful is the amount of success which every where follows from the exercise of his subtlety and power. He has made the history of the world to resemble the prophet's scroll, *written within and without,—mourning, lamentation, and woe*. And after all, how little do we see, or know, of what is really done, and endured; and how incapable are we of judging as to the effect of all this present evil, in relation to the future,—the scenes of eternity!

It may be objected to this doctrine, that, if we admit it to be true, we must suppose that a fallen creature may possess the attribute of omnipresence. But there is no such difficulty in what the scriptures inculcate on this point, when properly considered. It is true we speak of the temptations which are diffused over the earth as proceeding from Satan, and of the desolations thus wrought as resulting from his immediate influence. This we do,

however, not because he is the only tempter, but because he is the chief of the vast confederacy thus occupied. Thus we describe the conquests of Alexander as *his*,—as though effected by his arm alone. We do the same in the case of Cæsar, and others. Our meaning, however, is obvious. We only intend to say, that such victories were obtained by the powerful armies under the command of the persons so named. It is the same here. We believe temptation to be the work, not of Satan only, but, in the language of scripture, of *the devil and his angels*;—and with respect to the multitude of these angels we have no means of judging. They may be, and probably are, far more numerous than the human race. And when the Redeemer is described as triumphing over them in the character of principalities and powers, this language suggests, that what we call Satan's kingdom, is a league, or compact of guilty natures, including all the gradations, the forms, and the usual machinery of an extensive empire.

Nor is it a sound objection to this doctrine, that it supposes beings possessed of extraordinary intelligence to be engaged in a protracted warfare, which, in the nature of things, must end in defeat, and signal destruction. It is not in a world where we so often see the greatest intellectual superiority connected with the madness of atheism, that such an objection should be deemed formidable. The case with which the misguided passions can unhinge the noblest capacities, or render them worse

than useless, is ever before us. The extent to which this process of spiritual intoxication may have proceeded in the case of Satan and his myriads we cannot know; nor do we know how many sources of delusion, which belong not to our state of being, have contributed to the present infatuation of these powers of darkness. Thus much is certain, they have drank of the enchanted cup so as to put falsehood in the place of truth, and to go on in sinning, though they tremble as they do it. They cannot be ignorant that the revelations of heaven bid them anticipate a most disastrous overthrow. They must know that this event is expected with the utmost confidence and joy by all the hosts of heaven, and by all the devout on earth. But there would seem to be in them, as in the depraved among ourselves, a much-loved and ever-active infidelity, with regard to such predictions, exposing them to strong delusion, so that they not only believe a lie, but glory in doing so, viewing it as the indication of their wisdom, their independence, and their prowess!

Insensate hope, conceiving from despair.

It has sometimes been said, that the doctrine of Satanic agency destroys our responsibility. But this objection is so feeble as scarcely to deserve an answer. It is plain, from the scriptures, that we are no more obliged to be the captives of Satan, than to be the captives of our own sinful

propensities. In either case, allurements, or assault, may come from without, but to yield must be our own act. After all that metaphysicians may teach on this subject, it will be found that our bondage is not a matter of necessity, but of choice.

And it must be remembered in conclusion, that the doctrine which respects the being and influence of Satan, is altogether a doctrine of revelation. Nature, indeed, has nothing opposed to it,—rather the contrary; but it could never have been learnt from nature. It is true, the faith of pagan nations has always had respect to certain evil powers, described as interfering in the affairs of men. But we know that those nations were long since apprized of the controversy between the seed of the serpent and of the woman;—a circumstance, sufficient to explain the intimations of this nature which occur in their history.

From the facts thus briefly noticed, Christians may discern something of that serious import which attaches to their calling. They have not only to wrestle with flesh and blood,—no mean opponents,—but against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places:—against the multitude, the strength, and the discipline of the hosts which bow to Apollyon as their leader. Hell from beneath, is moved to prevent their advance toward the mansions prepared for them. Every weapon that may wound or destroy is in use against them, and for that purpose. Their understanding, their heart, their fleshly appetites,—all have a tendency

soul in life; and that he is at once the preserver of these frail bodies, and the guide and sanctifier of the fallen natures which inhabit them.

The judgment and sympathies of men, in regard to every thing religious, are deeply impaired; but the conclusions which follow from facts and reflections of the kind now adverted to, have commended themselves to the prevailing feeling of the human race, and have exerted a powerful influence over human action. We find men shrinking, as it were instinctively, from the thought of dwelling in a world abandoned to accident, or to itself. So strong has this feeling been, that where the views entertained of the Deity have been such as to preclude the supposition that all things are subject to his immediate influence, it has disposed the imagination to call a multitude of agencies into being, appointed, as delegates of the Supreme power, to the joint performance of this service. The objects and the changes in nature, have all been viewed by them as under this authorized guardianship, as was every thing that could affect the outward circumstances, or the intellectual and moral character of individuals and communities.

The lively Grecian, in a land of hills,
Rivers, and fertile plains, and sounding shores,
Under a cope of variegated sky,
Could find commodious place for every god,
Promptly received, as prodigally brought
From the surrounding countries—at the choice
Of all adventurers. With unrivalled skill,
As nicest observation furnished hints
For studious fancy, did his hand bestow

On fluent operations a fixed shape;
Metal or stone, idolatrously served.

And there is more of truth than may at first appear
in what follows.

And yet—triumphant o'er this pompous show
Of art, this palpable array of sense,
On every side encountered; in despite
Of the gross fictions, chanted in the streets
By wandering rhapsodists; and in contempt
Of doubt and bold denials hourly urged
Amid the wrangling schools—a SPIRIT hung,
Beautiful region! o'er thy towns and farms,
Statues, and temples, and memorial tombs,
And emanations were perceived; and acts
Of immortality, in Nature's course,
Exemplified by mysteries, that were felt
As bonds, on grave philosopher imposed
And armed warrior; and in every grove
A gay or pensive tenderness prevailed,
When piety more awful had relaxed.

'Take, running River, take these locks of mine,—
Thus would the votary say—'this severed hair,
'My vow fulfilling, do I here present,
'Thankful for my beloved child's return.
'Thy banks, Cephissus, he again hath trod,
'Thy murmurs heard, and drunk the crystal lymph,
'With which thou dost refresh the thirsty lip,
'And moisten all day long these flowery fields!'
And, doubtless, sometimes, when the hair was shed
Upon the flowing stream, a thought arose
Of Life continuous, Being unimpaired.

WORDSWORTH.

Certain it is, that the history of the world might be
appealed to as demonstrating, that the doctrine of a
divine influence, and of that influence as extending
to our ordinary affairs, and to the inmost secrecies
of the mind, is a conclusion sustained by the most
prevalent convictions of the human understanding,
and by some of the strongest sympathies of the

human heart. Whatever some solitary faction, in its moments of delirium, may have done, no nation has hitherto agreed to proscribe the belief of a divine presence and power in the earth; though few, unhappily, have been prepared to recognize that All-perfect Nature, whose word forms our only certain guide on matters of such high import.

The sum of the preceding statement is, that there is enough, in the relations pervading all material things, and in the evident feeling of mankind on this subject, to render our belief in the doctrine which teaches that the spirits of men are exposed to influences from other spiritual natures, manifestly reasonable,—so much so, as to make a hasty rejection of what is taught in scripture on this point, the certain indication, either of a pitiable weakness and presumption, or of alarming depravity.

Such men may say, *The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.* But what saith the voice of the Holy One, and the voice of nature too? *Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.* But the vanity of supposing that God has resigned his place of influence in the affairs, or in the hearts of men, is hardly greater than that of supposing that our spirits are

the only reasoning creatures in the wide field of creation, or than to deem it incredible that such natures, whether inferior to our own or superior to it, should possess a medium of approach to our faculties—our thoughts, imagination, and passions.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. The immediate reference of this passage is to the influence of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. But this is not the only spiritual influence connected with our present experience; and the language of the Saviour, in this instance, is applicable to all spiritual agency. We may hear the sound of the passing air, we may feel its pressure; but as to the cause of these sensations, we know not whence it comes nor whither it goes. We are conscious of the fact, but ignorant of the mode. We partake of the effect, but have a very imperfect knowledge of the concurrence of things by which it is produced. *So is every one who is born of the Spirit*, or at all influenced by purely spiritual causes. The air, which produces great and unquestionable results, and still eludes the sight, is thus employed to denote the effects of spiritual power among us, and to teach us, that our inability to comprehend much connected with the working of such power, ought not to form the slightest objection to its reality.

The whispering air
Sends inspiration from the shadowy heights,
And blind recesses of the caverned rocks.

What is thus said of the air, might be said of many influences in nature. We know that they exist, but *how*, or *wherefore*, are questions still to be answered. It is not the Bible only which has its appointment to prophesy in part, nor is it merely with respect to the more mysterious doctrines of the Bible that we know only in part.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the word *spirit*, is of the same meaning with the word air. It appears to have been applied to the mind, from its seeming dependence on our respiration for its connexion with the body. Through the imperfections of human language, the term has been thus accommodated in every age and nation; and is to be understood as referring to a reasoning spiritual existence, with all the usual properties of such an existence, both in distinction from the inanimate things surrounding us, and from the mere instinct of the brute.

II. We shall now proceed to notice, more particularly, WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH ON this theme. The sacred writers affirm, that the chain of created existence does not terminate with man;—that as there are existences greatly below him, so there are others rising above him. Even in his perfect state, he was made “lower” than the angels. How much lower he is now become we may only conjecture. But these angels have not all continued in their perfectness. Some of them appear to have fallen as far below humanity,

by reason of their sinfulness, as they were once superior to it. They became disaffected to the Majesty of Heaven; made war upon his throne; and were driven from the regions of light, to the outer darkness prepared for them. Of this revolt there was a memorable leader, who still possesses a kind of sovereignty; one whose

——— countenance, as the morning star that guides
The starry flock, allured them, and with lies
Drew after him the third part of heaven's host.

The legions of apostate spirits who obeyed his voice during the war in heaven, obey him still. He is their prince, and to his throne they have transferred the allegiance due to the Creator. By the agency of this great adversary, the fall of man was accomplished; and throughout the scriptures he is described as pursuing men with malignant hate, because the workmanship of God, and as ever hating them the more, the more they partake of a resemblance to their Maker. The manner in which this always active enemy of God, and of our race, is spoken of, demonstrates his personality. To question this is to destroy all the certainties of language, and not only to deprive the sacred writers of the commanding endowments which we expect should distinguish inspired men, but to deny them the lowest attributes of common sense.

This being, variously described as Apollyon, the Devil, and Satan, is said to be continually about our path, watching, and laying snares, that we

may become entangled with evil, and fall, and perish. Thus did he compass the way of Job, that he might perplex it; thus did he watch the heart of Peter, and wound it; thus did he beset the heart of Judas, and entered into it; and thus, as the prince of the power of the air, he works in the children of disobedience. Hence the many exhortations in scripture to watchfulness and prayer, that we may not become enthralled by the devices of this enemy through ignorance of them. The senses, the passions, the imagination, the intellect, all are avenues of approach in the warfare which he maintains against us. And fearful is the amount of success which every where follows from the exercise of his subtlety and power. He has made the history of the world to resemble the prophet's scroll, *written within and without,—mourning, lamentation, and woe.* And after all, how little do we see, or know, of what is really done, and endured; and how incapable are we of judging as to the effect of all this present evil, in relation to the future,—the scenes of eternity!

It may be objected to this doctrine, that, if we admit it to be true, we must suppose that a fallen creature may possess the attribute of omnipresence. But there is no such difficulty in what the scriptures inculcate on this point, when properly considered. It is true we speak of the temptations which are diffused over the earth as proceeding from Satan, and of the desolations thus wrought as resulting from his immediate influence. This we do,

however; not because he is the only tempter, but because he is the chief of the vast confederacy thus occupied. Thus we describe the conquests of Alexander as *his*,—as though effected by his arm alone. We do the same in the case of Cæsar, and others. Our meaning, however, is obvious. We only intend to say, that such victories were obtained by the powerful armies under the command of the persons so named. It is the same here. We believe temptation to be the work, not of Satan only, but, in the language of scripture, of *the devil and his angels*;—and with respect to the multitude of these angels we have no means of judging. They may be, and probably are, far more numerous than the human race. And when the Redeemer is described as triumphing over them in the character of principalities and powers, this language suggests, that what we call Satan's kingdom, is a league, or compact of guilty natures, including all the gradations, the forms, and the usual machinery of an extensive empire.

Nor is it a sound objection to this doctrine, that it supposes beings possessed of extraordinary intelligence to be engaged in a protracted warfare, which, in the nature of things, must end in defeat, and signal destruction. It is not in a world where we so often see the greatest intellectual superiority connected with the madness of atheism, that such an objection should be deemed formidable. The case with which the misguided passions can unhinge the noblest capacities, or render them worse

than useless, is ever before us. The extent to which this process of spiritual intoxication may have proceeded in the case of Satan and his myriads we cannot know; nor do we know how many sources of delusion, which belong not to our state of being, have contributed to the present infatuation of these powers of darkness. Thus much is certain, they have drank of the enchanted cup so as to put falsehood in the place of truth, and to go on in sinning, though they tremble as they do it. They cannot be ignorant that the revelations of heaven bid them anticipate a most disastrous overthrow. They must know that this event is expected with the utmost confidence and joy by all the hosts of heaven, and by all the devout on earth. But there would seem to be in them, as in the depraved among ourselves, a much-loved and ever-active infidelity, with regard to such predictions, exposing them to strong delusion, so that they not only believe a lie, but glory in doing so, viewing it as the indication of their wisdom, their independence, and their prowess!

Insensate hope, conceiving from despair.

It has sometimes been said, that the doctrine of Satanic agency destroys our responsibility. But this objection is so feeble as scarcely to deserve an answer. It is plain, from the scriptures, that we are no more obliged to be the captives of Satan, than to be the captives of our own sinful

propensities. In either case, allurements, or assaults, may come from without, but to yield must be our own act. After all that metaphysicians may teach on this subject, it will be found that our bondage is not a matter of necessity, but of choice.

And it must be remembered in conclusion, that the doctrine which respects the being and influence of Satan, is altogether a doctrine of revelation. Nature, indeed, has nothing opposed to it,—rather the contrary; but it could never have been learnt from nature. It is true, the faith of pagan nations has always had respect to certain evil powers, described as interfering in the affairs of men. But we know that those nations were long since apprized of the controversy between the seed of the serpent and of the woman;—a circumstance, sufficient to explain the intimations of this nature which occur in their history.

From the facts thus briefly noticed, Christians may discern something of that serious import which attaches to their calling. They have not only to wrestle with flesh and blood,—no mean opponents,—but against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places:—against the multitude, the strength, and the discipline of the hosts which bow to Apollyon as their leader. Hell from beneath, is moved to prevent their advance toward the mansions prepared for them. Every weapon that may wound or destroy is in use against them, and for that purpose. Their understanding, their heart, their fleshly appetites,—all have a tendency

to evil; and on these tendencies the enemy is ever casting the sparks of temptation, in hope that they may kindle, and burn, and sink them to the lowest death. Before these evil agencies, the strength of the mighty has often become as tow; and the wisdom of the wise as foolishness. To do evil is the work into which they have too commonly seduced whatever is brilliant in human genius, and whatever is strong in the confederacies of human power.

Who then may hope to prevail in this warfare? May we safely confide in our own wisdom, while exposed to all the false appearances that error can assume? May we trust in our own attachment to what is good, in the face of all the enticements with which evil may be attended and arrayed? The bare thought may not be endured; so manifest is the ignorance and presumption from which such a course must proceed. It would be to commit the bark of the infant Moses to the storms of the Atlantic,—to urge the strength of a moth against the pressure of a mountain.

It is not on these unequal terms that we are summoned to the contest. The scriptures, which reveal to us the existence and the agency of Satan and his angels, have made us acquainted with the existence and employment of MICHAEL AND HIS ANGELS. Now, these exalted natures are with us, and are probably more numerous, certainly more powerful, than all who are against us. They possess the various attributes retained by the fallen,

and possess them in their unimpaired energy and loveliness. The disease of sin has shed nothing of its dark, deforming, debilitating influence upon them. Their brightness is unsullied, their beauty perfect, and their arm has all the strength of its youth. Heaven is said to be their abode. There Daniel saw *thousands of thousands ministering to God, and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before him*. And concerning these it is said, that they are *all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation*.

At present, these heirs of salvation are dying creatures, beset with numberless imperfections, and often absorbed in a multitude of trivial cares and pursuits. But the angels of God know that these dying creatures must ere long triumph over death; that their many imperfections will be soon, and for ever, thrown off; and that even now, while so far busied and ensnared by the things of this vain state, there is in them the beginning of all that nobleness of principle and feeling, by which they are themselves animated.

And, indeed, were there nothing in believers, considered in themselves, to call forth the attention of holy angels, the relation in which they stand to the Redeemer, as members of his mystical body, and the high destiny to which they are in consequence appointed, would be enough to render them objects of peculiar interest with all the obedient throughout the universe. But the tendency of the gospel is *according to godliness*; and

the saints are the delight of angels, both on account of what they *are*, and of what they *shall* be. Accordingly, the sacred history abounds with instances in which angels have ministered to the welfare of the church; and with others in which their offices have been extended to individuals. These facts begin with the earliest ages, and multiply upon us in connexion with the proclamation and establishment of the present economy.

The extent of that ministry in which these visitants are now employed among us, is a point on which we are not qualified to form a positive judgment. But the intimations of scripture as to this particular, and the suggestions of reason, would seem to warrant the conclusion, that it is at least as considerable as that which the evil angels are allowed to prosecute. *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him. He will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.* A messenger of this kind is described as bearing the departing spirit of Lazarus into Abraham's bosom; another as appearing to the Saviour in his conflict, strengthening him. It was an angelic agency which first announced the Saviour's resurrection; nor can we have forgotten Peter's release from prison. And when the Redeemer is about to *gather out of his kingdom all things that offend*, he is said to *send forth his angels*, that it may be done.

Thus the war between the evil and the good, which began in heaven, has been transferred to our

world. The throne of God is no longer the immediate point of attack; but the destruction, or the salvation of man, is the object for which a struggle, pervading the whole earth, and reaching through the whole period of its history, has been maintained.

But, happily for us, in considering the agency employed on our behalf, we have to look above the might of angels. We read in scripture of the HOLY SPIRIT, equal with the Father and the Son, and of one nature with them, who deigns to interpose for us, and to effect within us and around us what no created power could accomplish. To the influence of the Holy Spirit the highest importance is attached in the word of God; and the work ascribed to him embraces every thing that can render us wise, and pure, and happy, and every thing that may secure us in such a state for ever and ever.

The mind is like the body, where if one member suffer, the whole system is affected. The heart, in its various passions, becoming the seat of disease, must necessarily exert an injurious influence on the understanding, afflicting it with sluggishness, obscurity, disorder, and, ultimately, with a total blindness to spiritual things. Accordingly, men are said to be *alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart*. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to remove this blindness. This explains the prayer of David, *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*. Hence the

statement of Paul, *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ.* Spiritual wisdom is thus declared to be the gift of the Holy Spirit. The natural man,—man in a state of unaided nature, *receiveth not the things of the Spirit, they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Nor is this power to discern the truth of christian doctrine the only benefit conferred on the human mind by the Divine Spirit. There is a power given to the doctrines of the gospel, which connects them with the affections, so as to change the heart. The charge of guilt and depravity which the word prefers, is felt to be well founded, and the soul shrinks from the appalling evils to which, as the consequence, it is exposed. It is the office of the Spirit thus to convince of sin, and, having done so, to take of the things of Christ,—the mercies of his perfected salvation,—and to apply them as the appointed remedy to the troubled bosom. The humbled offender is not only enabled to trust in the atonement thus revealed, but learns, in answer to his prayers, the truth of that promise, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will*

put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

In all the troubles of his after life, it is in the influence of this benign power that the believer finds his support. In all his perplexity, and in all his weakness, here is his guide, and here his strength. Spiritual enemies are overcome, advances are made in that purer knowledge and that purer feeling, which raise men to fellowship with heaven. But the influence which spiritualized the mind at first, is the same which has led it thus onward toward the rest and glory which the scriptures reveal. Satan may be treacherous and powerful, much beyond our largest conceptions, but here is an ever-present and an all-sufficient help;—wisdom, without limit; knowledge, from which nothing may be concealed; and power, which, in its slightest movement, must consume all opposition.

In what the Holy Spirit has done on earth, we discern something of that elevation of thought and affection, and something of that nobler bearing, which his agency must necessarily inspire. But to judge adequately of his work, we must pass from earth to heaven. There we shall probably see, as we cannot now see, the ten thousand escapes which have been vouchsafed to us, the innumerable mercies which have been bestowed upon us, and the ever-returning folly and sin, by which we have grieved the Holy One, and tried his long-suffering. There also his work will be perfect. The last danger

will have passed, and the last touch will have been given to the likeness of God on the soul. All its properties will be cleansed, invigorated, rightly employed, and the fulness of their exercise be a fulness of joy. Could we now see that work as it is, and could we see more of that mysterious working, by which it is carried on to such marvellous maturity, we should indeed pray, *Take not thy Holy Spirit from me*; and loudly should we bless him who has said, *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*

Such then, according to the scriptures, are the spiritual influences by which the human mind is affected in the present world. Man is a being in whose fate the whole intelligent universe is concerned. The rebellious would have him continue a party to their treason. The obedient would see him recovered to their own state of allegiance and blessedness. And there is war between them on his account. But so great is the compassion of God toward us, that the issue is not left to the possible uncertainties of such a contest. An influence all divine is vouchsafed to the soul, that thus its ultimate felicity and glory may be placed beyond the possibility of failure.

To all these influences did the Saviour refer, when he said, *The wind bloweth where it listeth, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth*. But if this

mysteriousness belong to them all, how may we escape delusion? How may we know whether the influences which come upon us are good or evil? Satan can appear as an angel of light, error can assume the likeness of truth; evil can put on the semblance of good. Are there any means by which we may certainly distinguish between these? When an apostle writes, *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God*, it is clearly implied, that the means of conducting such a trial are within our reach.

III. We may observe, generally, that the Bible is our acknowledged standard of truth, and that THE SPIRIT WHICH SPEAKS NOT ACCORDING TO THIS RULE, IS NOT OF GOD. The great design of miraculous powers was to attest the authority of scripture, that the inspired volume, once completed, the church might possess ample guidance to the end of time. And, as if for the purpose of preventing any expectation of additions to that word, as left by the apostles, the power of working miracles ceased with the apostolic age. It is true that pretensions to this power survived that period; but in every instance, much subsequent to the first century, there is the strongest reason for considering them as the effect of misconception or fraud. And it is important to remember, that supposing these gifts to have passed away with the apostles and their immediate disciples, they must have disappeared, as they seem to have done, imperceptibly. Every

argument that may now be resorted to in support of a continuance of miraculous powers, might be urged in support of making additions to the documents of holy scripture ; and the church of Rome, accordingly, in urging her pretensions to such power, has only been consistent in laying claim to a spirit of infallibility, and in making her traditions of the same authority with the commandments of God. An argument which should prove that *any* of the extraordinary gifts of the apostolic age were to be perpetuated, must prove that they were *all* to be perpetuated, the gift of healing and the gift of inspiration alike. Hence, the next step after an expectation of new miracles, should be the expectation of new Bibles, or that some modern saint should attempt to supply the deficiencies of the Evangelists and of St. Paul. We repeat, therefore, that the word of God is the sole, and the sufficient standard, by which to try our own spirits, and the spirits supposed to have influence over us.

Taking this perfect and unerring volume as our guide, we may be assured that the influence which disposes us to make light of sin, under whatever disguise this may be done, is not of God. The Spirit of God is holy, the angels in heaven are holy, and all that descends to us from them is in accordance with their nature. The divine word sufficiently describes what that work upon the heart is, which it is the design of all heavenly influence to promote. That which we may expect to be done within us, is that which we have distinctly

promised, and pourtrayed before us. The whole of this we should seek, and nothing beyond this should we for a moment anticipate. Whatever tends to produce distrust of the word of God, to nourish spiritual sloth, to impair a habit of devotion, to lessen our christian usefulness, to turn the mind from what is certain to what is doubtful, from truth to speculation, from doctrines that lead immediately to our sanctification to others which have no such immediate bearing;—whatever shall serve to puff up with spiritual pride, though under the garb of a monastic humility; or to make our own prominence and power a favourite object, though under the persuasion of a zeal for God; and, finally, whatever is found to alienate our affections from our fellow-men, and especially from our fellow-christians,—all such things are manifestly the offspring of our own earthly nature, or the result of influences still more opposed to God and goodness.

The subject of this chapter forcibly reminds us of THE IMPORTANCE WHICH IS ATTACHED TO HUMAN NATURE IN THE ECONOMY OF THE UNIVERSE. It is a fallen nature, every way stained and polluted; but its destiny calls forth the never-slumbering watchfulness, and the never-ceasing activity, of the good and evil through every known region of spiritual existence. The ruined archangel, and his embattled host, have long since made the destruction of man the great object of their policy. To

his improvement. How manifest
utility, the importance of strong
necessity of watchfulness, prayer,
fidelity. The facts now reviewed
of the peculiarity, and the gran-
dure in which Christians are en-
gaged in different positions, and various
it will be our object in the
to consider. May God, even our
strengthen, settle us ; may he
be immovable, always abounding
in the Lord, forasmuch as we know that
we are in vain in the Lord. So fight
the good fight, beateth the air.

prevent this, the Son of God becomes incarnate, and a sacrifice; the hosts of heaven array themselves, and go forth to meet the enemy in our cause; and the Spirit of the Highest descends to earth, deigns to take up his abode in the human heart, and supplies the weapons, the skill, and the strength, which must render the faithful more than conquerors through Him who hath loved them. Surely the results about which such wonderful agencies are employed, and thus employed, must be beyond all our thought momentous! To be among the lost, or the saved, must be an event of unspeakable, of inconceivable magnitude. Were all the power, the opulence, and the pleasures of the earth at our bidding, should we deem them valueless? Were all its evils to break at once upon us, should we affect to be unmoved? If this would not be, then be it remembered, that to be uninfluenced by what the Almighty has said as to the worth of our spiritual nature, and the danger to which it is exposed, is to do more strangely. It is to hazard an infinite loss, and to choose an infinitude of evil in its place! What an emphasis do these considerations give to that scripture,—*What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?* How true is that saying,—*The redemption of the soul is precious!*

The Christian will see much in what has now passed before him, that, under the divine blessing,

may conduce to his improvement. How manifest is the duty of humility, the importance of strong faith, and the necessity of watchfulness, prayer, and elevated spirituality. The facts now reviewed exhibit something of the peculiarity, and the grandeur, of that warfare in which Christians are engaged; and the different positions, and various progress, of which it will be our object in the ensuing chapters to consider. May God, even our own God, *establish, strengthen, settle us*; may he render us *steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. So fight we, not as one who beateth the air.*

CHAP. IV.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —BELIEVING.

————— The Mind's repose
On evidence is not to be ensured
By act of naked Reason. Moral truth
Is no mechanic structure, built by rule;
And which, once built, retains a steadfast shape,
And undisturbed proportions; but a thing
Subject————to vital accidents;
And like the water-lily, lives and thrives,
Whose root is fixed in stable earth, whose head
Floats on the tossing waves.—————

————— But how acquire
The inward principle, that gives effect
To outward argument; the passive will
Meek to admit; the active energy
Strong and unbounded to embrace, and firm
To keep and cherish? How shall man unite,
With self-forgetting tenderness of heart,
An earth-despising dignity of soul?
Wise in that union, and without it blind!

WORDSWORTH.

THE sacred writers attach the greatest importance to the exercise of mind which we denote by the term—believing. They repeatedly assure us, that to be without faith, is to be in a perishing condition. *He that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him.* On the other hand, to believe, is, in the language of scripture, to possess the main element of all goodness, and blessedness. Unbelief, therefore, is our greatest evil,

its opposite is our greatest good. The scriptures know nothing of that doctrine which describes man as free from all accountableness in the matter of his opinions. On the contrary, it teaches that such as reject the truth, must do it wickedly,—so wickedly as to be justly liable to an everlasting punishment. *If any man will do his will, said Jesus, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* These are the words of him who *knew what is in man*; and they distinctly trace the absence of saving faith, to the absence of right dispositions,—to the want of a proper temperament in ourselves, and not to the want of sufficient evidence in connexion with the gospel. With men who receive the Bible as the word of God, these things are so plain as to need little explanation or enforcement.

And even in the case of others, a very small share of that philosophical shrewdness, to which so much pretension is made, should be enough to induce a considerable agreement with the doctrine of scripture on this point. A temper unreasonably distrustful is never pleasing. We do not choose such a man as our friend, and we find it difficult to bestow upon him any large measure of affection. Such a temper, moreover, becomes increasingly odious, in proportion to the claims of the authority whose testimony it rejects; and, generally, in proportion to the importance of the communications to which it may refer. If the quarter from which any supposed statement proceeds, be one where the greatest wisdom and excellence concur to render

its truth certain, or in the highest degree probable, we say it ought to be received with a marked confidence; and, if relating to the security of great interests, we say it ought to be listened to with gratitude, and in the earnest hope that it may be true. But if, on the contrary, we meet with cold questionings; with a manifest preference of doubt to certainty, of disputation to acquiescence; and with a readiness to believe the most evil and improbable things of men, rather than receive on their evidence what it is not exactly pleasant to receive, we know what the impression is which such perverseness must produce. We feel at once, that there is a great gulph fixed between the heart of such a man and our own heart. We deplore the mental vice thus exhibited, and say of such persons, *My soul, come thou not into their secret*. It is felt, that the men who are thus distrustful of others, must necessarily be no less distrustful of ourselves; and that, on their own part, they may very properly be the objects of all that suspicion in which it is their habit to indulge.

Thus the man whose opinions are not to be regulated by the acknowledged laws of reason and evidence in common affairs, is uniformly regarded as under the influence of disorderly and vicious feeling. The mind soon loses its patience with him; and the punishment of his scepticism is, that, in his turn, he is generally suspected and avoided. In short, the language of this proneness to unbelief, when relating to common matters, is,

that *all men are liars*, and when applied to religion, it is *to make God a liar*;—and surely the state of mind which is censurable as opposed to the fair testimony of man, can hardly be innocent as opposed to the better sustained testimony of God. It will be seen, that in this argument, we assume the gospel to be a well-attested revelation from heaven.

It will be proper also to add, that every thing urged to shew the innocency of error as to the doctrines of scripture, will apply with equal force to its precepts; so that it may be quite as safe, in regard to the future, to violate the one, as to reject the other. Thus, were the reasoning adverted to generally admitted, the world would be at once without any standard either of truth or duty; every thing being left to shape itself from the notions, or passions, which may happen to prevail. Each man would in fact be a law to himself, and there could be no vice even in the most atrocious deeds, provided the offender has only succeeded in rendering them approvable to his own mind. To inflict a penalty on such a person must be unjust, since it would be to punish him for what may have been his misfortune, but cannot have been his fault. But there is no end to these absurdities of the wise,—these infantile follies on the part of men who are too intelligent to be instructed even by their Maker.

The ingenuous must at once perceive, that there is an accountableness attaching to the habit of the

mind, no less than to the outward conduct. We do not at all need the indulgences of the flesh to become involved in ruinous depravity. Satan is not chargeable with them, and the universe has not another nature so hateful, so unlike God. We sin by a forbidden indulgence of the reason, the imagination, or the passions, no less certainly, and often no less extensively, than by the external acts of fraud, intemperance, and bloodshed. To raise the will against God, is an offence as palpable, in the view of a spiritual nature, as to raise the right arm against man. The pride which only covertly spurns at the wisdom of the Creator in his word, may be greatly more iniquitous than that which betrays itself in the most unsympathizing deportment toward men. The guilt of overt treason against an earthly monarch, may be as nothing compared with the guilt of secret treason against the majesty of heaven.

It is true that our ability to receive the gospel is the gift of God. But the scriptures clearly teach, that wherever true faith is possessed, it is possessed, in part, as the result of attention to a series of means, the neglect of which would have been a sin, and would have made the want of faith a sin.

We propose in this chapter to trace some of the more considerable Difficulties to be contended with in our Belief of the truth to their source, and to notice some of the means by which, under the divine blessing, they may be Overcome. Before

attempting this, however, it may be advisable to explain, in few words, what the sacred writers intend by Believing,—or by saving faith.

I. The word faith, in its most simple meaning, refers to a state of mind which we are constantly evincing. IT DENOTES ASSENT TO THE TRUTH OF A STATEMENT OR TESTIMONY. Thus we every day manifest that we consider the great events in history to have been, upon the whole, truly reported. We do not, for a moment, question the existence of such men as Charles the Fifth, Alfred the Great, or Alexander; nor do we doubt the truth, in the main, of what has been recorded concerning them. These things are matters of faith with us; that is, we have not seen them, but we nevertheless believe in them. It is the same in other things. We may not be able to show that the earth is round; but on the testimony of men better instructed, we may believe it to be so. We may never have seen the half of our own island, and yet we may credit the accounts given of the whole, and even those which relate to the great divisions, and various population, of our globe. Faith, even in this sense, agrees with Paul's definition of it, — *the evidence of things not seen*. It gives to what might otherwise be mere conjecture the force of certainty; it makes the unseen visible, and brings the distant near.

But the faith of which we read in scripture consists in this exercise of mind with regard to a

particular object, or rather to a particular CLASS OF OBJECTS. It is not merely the act of believing; it is a belief of the *truth*. It is the assent we give to the verity of the great doctrines of Holy Writ. It has a special reference to the existence, the dignity, the offices, and the salvation of the great Redeemer. Man, according to the scripture, is guilty, depraved, self-destroyed. The believer is persuaded of this alarming truth, and is thus prepared to rejoice in the fact, that in Jesus Christ is our help; that as the equal of the Father; and as bone of our bone, he is the daysman between the offending and the offended; and *the wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification, and redemption, of those who confide in him.*

But again, the faith of which we read in scripture as saving faith, includes the PERSONAL APPLICATION of the truth said to be received. *The devils believe, and tremble.* The truth fills them with alarm, but leaves them in all their hardness and impenitence. If this were its only effect upon men, the heavenly message would fail of the end it is meant to accomplish. It consists of truths pre-eminently fitted to soften the heart, to produce gratitude, and a return to God. And, in the language of scripture, men receive these truths only as they are permitted to exert this influence upon their character and conduct. This may be to confound faith with its effects; but such is the manner of the sacred writers. The sinner inquires, What must I do to be saved? The answer simply

is, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*. But to understand what it is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, it will be necessary to go beyond a few separate passages, to the general amount, or tenour of the apostolic doctrine on this subject. The neglect of this rule must expose the mind to error on the right hand and the left. The apostles say little with respect to the nature of faith, much more about its objects, and still more with regard to its fruits. By these we must know it. The belief which is from the heart, or from the sincerity of the soul, is a belief unto righteousness. The faith connected with salvation has respect to a nobler state of being, and overcomes the world. Its objects are of the purest, the most benevolent character, and it is accordingly said to work by love, and to purify the soul. The truth as it is in Jesus, is a kind of moral machine, the use of which, when applied to the soul with more and more completeness, is to bring it back to its lost state of holiness, and fitness for the divine presence. May this word *work mightily*,—more mightily than ever in those who believe, and may it become *quick and powerful* to such as believe not.

II. Our design in this chapter supposes that there are instances in which it is difficult to exercise this faith. Nor should this circumstance occasion surprise. It is no more strange that fallen creatures should find it difficult to believe the truth, than that they should find it difficult to

practise the lessons of duty. If, as we have seen, we are accountable to God for what we believe, as much as for what we do, it is just as reasonable to expect impediments in the one case as in the other. If there were no temptation to do evil, no possibility of doing it, there could be nothing praiseworthy in abstaining from it. Thus, if to receive certain doctrines were a work of necessity, resulting from causes which it would be impossible to resist, it is not easy to conceive how the act of receiving them could be described as being either good or evil. To suppose, therefore, that there must be something defective, something as it ought not to be, in the gospel, because it is sometimes hard to believe it, is as though we should say there must be something wrong in the most acknowledged principles of human duty, since we sometimes find it no easy matter to act upon them. Hence we concede nothing to the sceptic, by allowing him to become aware of the inward struggle by which the faith of a believer is often shaken or enfeebled.

When we read the *Paradise Lost*, and meditate on the thought and emotion, both good and evil, which it brings before us, we greatly wonder. We know that all the conceptions and the feelings attributed to Satan and his host, and all the fascinations thrown around them, must have had some place in the mind of the poet, or they would never have been so exhibited by him. And in that same mind there must have been something of that reposing peacefulness, and something of those

soarings of seraphic contemplation and seraphic joy, which the same best monument of human genius so marvellously embodies. And was there no struggle between the powers of light and darkness when meeting thus in the same spirit? Oh yes—and the brightness that triumphed there, is the more bright from its contrast with the darkness. This was to tread down the main strength of the enemy; to do battle where the danger was the thickest, and, like his own Abdiel, to believe in the very front of all unbelief. It follows, therefore, that the trial of our faith should be no more a matter of surprise than the trial of our honesty, our patience, or our temperance; and, in fact, it necessarily includes the trial of all these, and of much more. Nor should it ever be forgotten that praise is not only proportioned to the good that may be done, but to the evil resisted. *Happy is the man that endureth temptation.*

In noticing the difficulties most prevalent among believers, in connexion with the exercise of this grace, we may observe, in the first place, that they not unfrequently take their rise from THE WANT OF A SUFFICIENT ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE FACTS OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE. The various reasonings which show the Bible to be indeed the book of God, are matters to which a few only have given due consideration. It is certain, also, that this negligence has been chargeable on the great body of those who have overlooked or denied the authority of scripture. These have sometimes been great men, in

their particular departments. But the attention bestowed by them on the facts of science, or the questions of literature, has not been extended to the evidences of revelation. In general, it has been very far otherwise. And it is a little too much to say, that when a man is known to be an excellent mathematician, it should be at once assumed that he is a great divine; nor can we readily see the wisdom of concluding, that because an individual is profoundly versed in the productions of Greek or Roman genius, he must of necessity be pre-eminently fitted to determine the claims of the gospel. Such men may be persons of great authority, and deservedly so, but, on the ground of sheer honesty and decency, their authority should be cautiously restricted to its proper sphere. There may be points on which they rise greatly above the ordinary level of mankind, and others where they sink to the grade of the lowest. They may have explored the secrets of the universe, with a penetration and an ardour which seem to transcend humanity; and they may have rejected the revelation of its Author, with all the brute prejudice of the multitude.

And, unhappily, that indisposition to the labour of inquiry, and that pressure of other things, by which so many both of the thoughtless and the thoughtful are kept from attending to this subject, not unfrequently continue to operate when men have *tasted of the heavenly gift, and felt the power of the world to come*. Should the sophistries of

unbelief be lodged in a mind thus unprovided against them, the effect will generally be, a state of disquietude and suffering. But the young convert will not be assailed frequently from such a quarter without looking round for the means of defence, and the result usually is, that he is led to scrutinize the foundations of his hope more narrowly, which serves to render him more stable than ever in the faith,—as the winter storm, by shaking the tree, facilitates the passage of its roots, so that they take a wider and deeper hold upon the earth.

It may be, that the person harassed by impious doubts, or suggestions, is much surprised that they should so rarely, if ever, have occurred to him in his state of irreligion;—forgetting that his solicitude about such matters then was not what he has since felt, and that his great adversary was not then apprehensive of losing that sovereignty within him, which he had so long maintained. But a crisis has now come. The question now to be determined is, whether the mind shall be henceforth and for ever the property of Satan or of God;—whether the whole man shall be the slave of sin, or the servant of righteousness; and we need not wonder that the struggle should be somewhat proportioned to the issues awaiting it: nor should any suggestion be regarded as too revolting, too horrible, to proceed from that enemy who is described as saying to the Son of God himself, *All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me!*

Another difficulty with which faith often has to contend, results from THE GREATNESS OF ITS OBJECTS. We are expected to credit many things with regard to the laws and vastness of the universe which we sometimes find it difficult to receive. But our faith, as Christians, relates to the perfections of his nature, by whom the universe was created, and by whom it is still sustained. It has respect to his greatness, who is not only distinct from his works, and above them, but immeasurably above them. The universe, viewed on the largest scale, must be supposed to have its limits, and must, accordingly, be as nothing when compared with the nature which is infinite. And the thought of these surpassing excellencies is inseparable from a devout consideration of the various objects of faith revealed in scripture. They have filled all time, and must fill eternity,—its farthest regions of weal and woe. Is it surprising, then, that the faith of the humble believer should be sometimes perplexed and shaken;—trembling, as beneath the weight and multitude of its objects?

He knows, however, that the difficulties of believing are few and trivial, compared with those which must attend on a state of unbelief. He remembers, also, that the perplexities resulting from the greatness of the divine nature, are no more than were to have been expected from the manifest greatness of the divine works. Hence, while that which he is required to believe is often beyond, immeasurably beyond his finite compre-

hension, it nevertheless becomes the reasonable object of his faith. He will not copy the fool's example, and say there is no God, because there is much in the nature of God to tell him of his feebleness, his meanness, and his danger.

But we must observe, that the difficulties of believing arise more frequently from the MYSTERIOUSNESS attaching to most of the objects of faith. We have seen that there is much mystery connected with all spiritual influences, and the same property belongs, more or less, to nearly every doctrine of revelation. What do we know of the manner in which the divine nature subsists as three persons in one God? Of the manner in which the divine and human natures are united in the person of the Redeemer? Of the way in which this same person, while enthroned in heaven, extends his controlling power through the most distant provinces of the universe? Mysteries, or things thus unexplained, meet the thoughtful Christian continually; and there are not wanting enemies to assure him, that it is the weakest, meanest thing imaginable, to talk of believing in what we have failed to understand.

How does the Christian proceed when thus assailed? There may be times when such sophistry has its effect, and he is not a little disturbed and grieved by it. But light is sown for the righteous. It is soon perceived that, of all follies, that is about the most palpable, which is thus heard to say, that no doctrine can be true, the

full reason of which is not within the reach of our feeble mind, and that no supposed fact can be real which we may not ascertain to be so by our own limited experience. The thoughtful believer does not need be told, that to follow out these positions would be to deny the immortality, the very existence of his own soul ; and to end in the madness of atheism. Hence his steady adherence to the well-attested instructions of the inspired volume, as to his guide with respect to all truth, and with respect to all that does exist, or may exist, in the universe. He distinguishes between what is contradictory, and what is mysterious ; in other words, between things which are manifestly impossible, and such as elude our understanding, either because they have not been sufficiently explained, or in consequence of the inherent, or the induced, feebleness of the human mind.

He remembers, moreover, that the sacred writers generally employ themselves in stating facts, rarely attempting any development of the manner in which they were brought to pass. That with a dignity and simplicity, every way becoming their high authority, they deem it enough to say that certain things were done, leaving those who may insist on knowing *how* such miraculous deeds were performed, to become involved in perplexities without end, if so it should please them. The Christian, also, remembers, that as it is with the records of miraculous power, so is it with the great doctrines which miracles were designed to

attest. They are stated as facts; and it is not pretended to divest any one of them entirely of mystery. The being of a God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the work of the Holy Spirit,—all these are put forth, not as matters of argument, but as mere statements, to be received just in the form in which they are communicated. It is evident, that to the proud curiosity of human nature such a course of procedure must be far from agreeable; and we may be assured, that in a fabricated bible, it would have had no place. But the Christian can see an admirable propriety in it, as found in a revelation of the grace of heaven to a fallen world. It appears to him as no more than a proper demand on the vain curiousness, and arrogant pretension of mankind, enjoining nothing beyond a due submission to the authority of God. He knows that the Bible was never intended to deprive the man who *would* be an unbeliever, of all plausible excuse in the indulgence of his inclination. But while viewing the promulgation, and the truths, of Christianity, as depriving those who reject it of all excuse before the Searcher of hearts, he is sensible that the man who, in his soul, may prefer the darkness to the light, has sufficient means left with which to smooth the way downwards to destruction. The Christian, then, does not deny that there are mysteries in the scriptures, nor does he pretend that they have never occurred to him as difficulties. Nevertheless, for reasons

of the kind now adduced, he is still a believer ; and this is his prayer—*Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.*

But a source of perplexity and feebleness in believing, more common than either of those we have adverted to, is A DEEP CONSCIOUSNESS OF GUILT. The Christian is an enlightened man,—not, it may be, with the wisdom of this world, but with that which brings before him the multitude and evil of his trespasses. He can see the taint of sin in innumerable instances, when others see it not. It is not the review of what he has said, or done, that grieves him most. The current of his thoughts is felt to have been made up of the vain and the impure ; and the restlessness of his passions is deplored as a constant outbreak against heaven. His presumptuous sins afflict him greatly, his secret sins still more. And all are before God ; gazed upon by him, never for a moment forgotten. In His presence, the sins, which did not occasion a passing notice when committed, are treasured up ; and the things which would have failed to appear sinful, had they been set forth as such, are there seen in their true light. There also, is the multitude of transgressions that were regretted at the time, but soon remembered no more ; and with this various record against us, is the faithful memorial of that concurrence of circumstances, from which every trespass has derived its amount of guiltiness. And then the God who has been thus careful in placing our sins beneath his constant

inspection, has declared sin to be the object of his infinite abhorrence. He bids us judge of his displeasure against it, by pointing to the pains, the sorrows, and the mortality which reign on earth; and again to the chains and darkness, the worm and the fire, of a lower world!

It is a painful sense of guilt and danger which such considerations have a tendency to produce; and the feeling always resulting from them, in the mind of the Christian, is not to be regarded as peculiar to the outset of a religious course. There are times when the impression made by these solemn remembrances is truly awful and alarming, even in the instance of the most established believer; especially if they force themselves upon him when aware of having recently yielded to a cold and declining temper in religion. Seasons there are, when every thing serving to place the sinner at the farthest remove from the divine favour, obtains a ready access to the notice of the mind, and seems to acquire a new power over the conscience and the heart, filling them with the most bitter anguish and foreboding. At such times, the sorrowing spirit is heard to say—Have I not sinned beyond recovery? Have I not finally grieved that Spirit who will not always strive with man? Can there be forgiveness for one whose sins have been so many, so constant, so aggravated? Notwithstanding all the largeness of expression in scripture on the subject of pardon, may I not have wasted my day of visitation, and

now seek a place for repentance in vain, though I seek it carefully with tears?

Such then is the case:—and how does the christian soldier meet these fiery darts of the evil one? By the shield of faith. He remembers, that in the promises of pardon, it is God himself who speaks, and not man: that the offers of immediate, complete, and everlasting forgiveness, are from Him who knows our sins as no other being can know them; who hates them as no other being can hate them; and who has been injured by them, more than all other beings taken together. He remembers that it is the lawgiver in person, who tenders the remission of trespasses; that it is the judge in person, who declares himself waiting to pronounce an honourable acquittal; and, above all, that the terms on which this inestimable blessing is offered, are those of pure grace,—the unbought blessing of heaven, free, alike, to the least vicious, and to the most vicious. Nor can the believer forget, that this is no new exhibition of the divine character and conduct; that thus Jehovah has been known, and confided in, through all ages; and that every age has supplied its witnesses to his faithfulness concerning the promises on which he has commanded us to rest our hope. As the facts which tend to produce despondency, are brought into comparison with these sources of hope, the weak are strengthened. The blood of sprinkling is known to speak better things than that of Abel, and it becomes a

matter of experience that there is peace in believing.

Another occasion of difficulty in this matter, arises from THE POWER OF OUR REMAINING SINFULNESS, after all the gospel may have done within us. There are moments in which we feel deeply that our character is far below that which the scriptures pourtray as becoming the gospel; and when a comparison of our present state, with a state of meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, produces the most painful discouragement. We have probably formed many good purposes; and have had seasons of devout aspiration, which have been to us like the beginnings of a celestial life. But this goodness has passed like *the morning cloud and early dew*. Sometimes we seem to read in vain, to hear in vain, and even to pray in vain. The seen and the temporal, threaten a total exclusion of the unseen and eternal; and the mind has no trivial work to perform, in confiding at all in those promises, which speak of a growth in grace, and of our awaking in the divine likeness. Under its brooding fears, and griefs, it is heard to exclaim—*Will this, can this ever be?*

In some minds, THE HISTORY OF THE NOMINAL CHURCH, does much to increase this spirit of distrust. That history, as generally presented to us, is little else than a gross libel upon Christianity. How severe is the trial of faith, sometimes produced by the story of nominally Christian nations,

and by the lives of the greater number of men who have called themselves Christians! And even where a few seem to be in earnest, as the professed disciples of the gospel, how much of pride, wrath, evil-speaking, and unchristian practice do we witness! Surely it is not wonderful, if in such a state of things, Satan should sometimes insinuate that the supposed work of grace upon the human heart is altogether a delusion.

But to all such suggestions, the Christian has to oppose the distinct statements, and faithful promises, of holy scripture. It is his happiness to remember, that however depraved Christian nations may be, nearly all that is good in them is the effect of their Christianity; and that however faulty the more serious professors of the gospel may be, it is still unquestionable *that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*. His graver reflection tells him, that even a nominal Christianity is better than paganism; and that the church, with all her blemishes, is almost a Paradise compared with the world. He calls to mind, also, what the gospel has done upon human nature in different ages; and learns to hope, and believe, that these achievements will prove to have been only a kind of first-fruits, preceding its harvest of glory. It is true the state of his own heart is discouraging. Still, on comparing the past with the present, he can hardly fail to see that he is a different, and certainly a much better man, since brought under the influence of the gospel. He is reminded that

the struggle between the evil and the good in his nature has been common to all believers; that even in the first churches, the imperfections of professors were often but too notorious; and that the Saviour, who compared the religion of his people to a bruised reed and smoking flax, has said, that he will not despise its day of small things. By the memory of such facts, the drooping are often cheered; the trembling invigorated; while a rising hope disposes to the exercise of prayer and praise.

It should be observed also, that AFFLICTION, not unfrequently, impedes the exercise of faith. Even good men often fail to perceive the necessity or the reason of their sufferings, especially if they happen to be weighty and continuous; and are generally taken by surprise with regard to much in the nature and the circumstances of the evils that befall them. From these causes they are sometimes tempted to entertain hard thoughts of God, and to write bitter things against themselves. There are moments in which they can become distrustful, or apprehensive, as to the benevolence of the power from which they are receiving so much of what is painful. Or if possessing too deep a sense of their unworthiness to consider themselves severely dealt with, they are then in danger of judging their afflictions to be penal, and of looking to the displeasure of the Almighty as threatening to consume them. In either case, faith is impaired, or wholly supplanted by the disturbed

state both of the feelings and of the understanding. The truth with respect to the divine nature, and the compassion breathed in the promises, are made ineffectual, through the excitement and misgiving of which the sufferer has become the subject. It was such a state of mind that led Job to pray, *Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me; which taught Jacob to exclaim, Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me.* It was under a similar impulse that Asaph uttered his lamentation—*My soul refuseth to be comforted. I remembered God and was troubled. I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? does his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?*

In opposing this unhappy state of feeling, the Christian has to remember that there is nothing peculiar in what has befallen him; nothing which the scriptures themselves, properly considered, would not have led him to anticipate; nothing which it does not behove him to regard as of divine appointment, or permission. Nor is he allowed to forget, that if the cup assigned to him has many bitter ingredients, it might have had more; while the season marked by the greatest privation, has left not a few of his mercies untouched. To

the general assurance, that all things pertaining to the present, are parts of an arrangement, made by infinite wisdom and benevolence with reference to the future, he has to add a careful recollection of the fact, that much of what belongs to this arrangement must necessarily be strange to him, from the circumstance of his manifold ignorance with regard to the present, and of his still greater ignorance as to the state which is to follow. What is done with a view to provide against the evils which beset us on earth, and to prepare us for the good reserved in heaven, must be very imperfectly understood by us, so long as our acquaintance with these evils, and with that heaven, shall be so defective. But however novel, and unanticipated, the divine dispensations may be, the believer is called upon to remember, that he shall not be tempted above what he is able to bear ;—the aids of divine grace being all-sufficient. Reflections of this nature constitute the force with which the Christian meets the spirit of hesitation, murmuring, and despondency. Thus aided, he stands in the evil day; and can perhaps say, with a veteran of ancient time,—*Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.*

The inference which must be deduced from the subject of this chapter, as to the present state of human nature, is an unwelcome one. Men find it hard,—sometimes even the best of men,—to avoid rejecting the testimony of their Maker. With perfect natures, the act of confiding in God is the

easiest, and most delightful, of all duties; with us it is the most difficult and painful. Thus the first transgression adheres to us as our great sin. Adam suspected his Maker, and was ruined by it. Men continue in unbelief, and perish every day as the consequence. Shall it be so with us? Let us remember that faith, so momentous in its influence, is *the gift of God*; and that the men who have it not, are the men who seek it not.

CHAP. V.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —REPENTANCE.

————— In his inmost heart
There answered him a secret voice, that spake
Of righteousness, and judgment after death,
And God's redeeming love, which fain would save
The guilty soul alive. 'Twas agony,
And yet 'twas hope; a momentary light,
That flashed through utter darkness on the cross,
To point salvation, then left all within
Dark as before. Fear, never felt till then,
Sudden and irresistible as stroke
Of lightning, smote him.

SOUTHEY.

God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. In this manner did Paul address himself to the men of Athens. His words distinctly teach, that repentance is a universal duty. It is true, that when the apostle thus spoke, the world was in a peculiarly darkened state on the subject of religion, and its depravity was proportioned to its gloom. Nevertheless, if exceptions had been admissible at all, they might have been found even in that age, as certainly as in our own. But the language of the apostle knows nothing of exceptions on this point, nor does that of scripture in general. Its appeal is to men, in all the possible

conditions of human nature; and its demand on each and all is the same,—*Repent*. This does not imply that all are to the same extent depraved. But it implies, beyond controversy, that all are so far depraved as to make repentance imperative on all. Nor does it follow from the text just cited, that the change of mind which the word repentance denotes, must be in all particulars the same in every instance. It is, however, clearly indicated, that this change, whether wrought suddenly, or by slow degrees, whether produced in a great measure by fearful apprehension, or almost wholly by the milder influence of persuasion, is still a real, a perceptible change, and one having certain marks more or less common to it, wherever it is experienced.

We may add, that the necessity of repentance, and its necessity in the case of the moral and the dissolute, the formalist and the profane, is placed beyond doubt by a memorable admonition from the lips of the Saviour. *There were present at that season, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

It is the struggle connected with the change thus insisted on, that will claim consideration in the present chapter. This conflict, like every other in the experience of Christians, is varied, from a multitude of causes; and, in each person, would seem to have something peculiar to itself. We cannot pretend to notice all these peculiarities. Our attention must be directed to the most general and obvious features in a state of penitence, and these it will not be difficult to view in connexion with particular cases. There are no two countenances strictly alike, and still we are all alike; nor is there any one voice that may be often mistaken for another, though the voice of man is readily distinguishable from all other utterances. There is a sameness in these particulars which bespeaks us men, and there is a diversity which pertains to us as individuals. It is the same in *the things of the Spirit*. We possess enough in common, as penitents and believers, to determine our character as such; while there is a sufficient variousness to render the works of grace conformable, in this respect, to the works of nature,—the spiritual creation of the inner man, being, thus far, a counterpart of what is observable in the outward man.

I. We shall understand our present subject more readily, perhaps, by adverting, in the first place, to THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE, as it is described in scripture. It is of the first importance to remember,

that there is much included in a state of penitence, which we may feel persuaded we possess; and that we may nevertheless be devoid of penitence. There are things which *must* exist, wherever there is a sincere contrition; and among these are many, that *may* exist where that state of mind is wanting. There is a certain extent to which we may go, and have the appearance of being true disciples; but there is a farther extent to which we may refuse to go, and, in this, we may discover that we are not disciples. We may thus tread in the steps of the repenting sinner, and, for a while, appear very like him; but when the clouds gather, and we begin to see war, there may be a drawing back, and this resemblance may prove to have been a mockery. Thus Demas forsook Paul; and Herod halted, after he had done *many things*.

Too much care, therefore, cannot be exercised, to distinguish between what is peculiar to a state of penitence, and the mere circumstances of such a state; between what the penitent man alone possesses, and what the impenitent may possess in common with him. The professor who has never been concerned to judge truly and wisely in this particular, is in danger of finding his place among those over-confident spirits, who go up to the gate of heaven saying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, only to learn, that, as self-deceivers, and *workers of iniquity*, they have no place allotted to them there.

Among the sins in which an offender has indulged, there may be some to which, in the course

of time, he submits no longer. But it must be borne in mind, that though this change may be unquestionable, and may have resulted, in a measure, from a kind of religious principle, the man may still be impenitent. There may be other practices, no less sinful, which, it is manifest, he has not renounced ; and repentance has respect, not to any particular precept, but to the authority of God, which is equally connected with all precepts ; and is a temper, accordingly, disposing us to regard every thing as evil which that authority condemns. So David felt, when he exclaimed,—*Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight ;* and again, when he declared, *I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be right.* Saul was unmindful of this important doctrine, in the matter of Agag ; and the forfeiture was his kingdom and his life. The young ruler in the gospel did not understand it, and he went away sorrowing.

It frequently happens, that there are sins with which men are not chargeable, simply because they have not possessed the means of indulging in them ; and the human heart, with its usual deceptiveness, can sometimes persuade such persons, that what has resulted from pure necessity, has been the effect of a religious choice. The want of ability, however, does not prove the want of inclination ; and, before God, the will and the deed are the same.

Nor are there wanting instances, in which men

are, to a great degree, honest, temperate, and even charitable, as the effect of a prudent calculating policy. And this fruit of a shrewd selfishness, will rarely exist without being lauded by others, and confided in by the individual, as the indication of personal religion.

It is possible also, that pursuits, generally proscribed as evil and degrading, may be abandoned in favour of others, less disreputable; and that the last state of the altered man, may be more hopeless than the first. It may be nothing better than a substitution of the lusts of the mind, in the place of the lusts of the flesh. He may have broken through the trammels of brute appetite; but his spirit may have acquired more of the guilty hardihood which distinguishes the fallen archangel,—or, at best, there may be as little of pure religion in the more refined and intellectual indulgences of the present, as in the vulgar sensualities of the past. Where changes of this description have been connected, in any degree, with excitements or fears of a religious nature, there is much danger of their being estimated greatly beyond their value. We may suppose the outward conduct, in an instance of this kind, to be unimpeachable, or no more liable to censure than that of the most acknowledged subjects of repentance. Still, it must be remembered, that repentance is not a matter of the outward conduct, but of the inward man. It changes the deportment indeed, but this it does as the effect of having changed the heart. To

repent, is not only to abstain from sin, but to hate it; not only to conform to religious exercises, but to delight in them. It springs from a belief in those scriptures which affirm the sinfulness of our nature, and the justice of our condemnation. This occasions alarm, and disposes the transgressor to rejoice in the tidings of a Mediator and Redeemer. And the forgiveness thus obtained, instead of contracting his views as to the evil of sin, serves, by reason of the medium through which it is conveyed, to strengthen his convictions of unworthiness, his sense of obligation, and his concern for righteousness of life. The law convinced and condemned; but it is the goodness of God, as thus manifest, that has led to repentance. When taught to see his condemnation as strictly just, the sinner became aware that a remission of his trespasses must be an act of pure grace; and from this it followed, that to continue in sin, would be to rebel alike against justice and mercy.

Thus the willingness of the Most High to pardon offending man, instead of lessening his motives with regard to holiness, increases them manifold. It leaves the same course before him; but supplies him with new, and more powerful inducements in its favour. It enforces the claims of strict justice, and of that goodness which pours its blessings on the obedient, by the superadded claim of an infinite graciousness,—of mercy to the guilty. It is a remission, which, in the manner of its development, discloses more of the divine excellencies than would

otherwise have been seen by us ; and which, accordingly, imparts an increased evil to all sin, as the opposite of those excellencies. Thus the scriptural doctrine of pardon is evidently so constructed as to secure obedience on the part of those who embrace it ; and, by rendering a concern for the divine glory its sustaining motive, clothes it with humility.

This is the view of things which we see illustrated in the instance of the woman who was a *sinner*,—she had *much forgiven, and she loved much* ; in the conduct of the prodigal, when retracing his steps toward his father's house ; and in the prostrate devotion of the publican, as he smites upon his breast, and cries, *God be merciful to me a sinner*.

The same is observable in the prayer of another penitent ;—*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness : according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight ; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts ; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness ; that the bones*

which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

II. Our object in considering the change of mind, which we have thus endeavoured to describe, is to exhibit THE DIFFICULTY, OR CONFLICT, WITH WHICH IT IS FREQUENTLY CONNECTED.

Whence does this arise? It may sometimes be traced to THE IMPERFECTIONS OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE. The truths which the mind has admitted may have been received with strong faith, and may possess an unusual power over the conscience and the affections; but they may be such as have more respect to the disease than to the remedy. Their effect, accordingly, may be to make the offender acquainted with his own sinfulness, more than with the grace of the Saviour. They may have more to do with the threatenings of scripture, than with its promises; with the despair of the lost, than with the triumphs of the saved. The repentance of Judas may possess a greater power to awaken fear; than the repentance of Peter to encourage hope; and what the Almighty has done to punish the impenitent, may produce a stronger impression than all that he has done in compassion to the

contrite. Thus the tendency of what is known, may be to nourish the spirit of the slave, more than the spirit of adoption. The law is seen in something of its spirituality, and the past appears as one course of revolt against heaven.

Attempts are made, perhaps, toward a reformation of character, but with little success. It is done without a sufficient dependence on divine aid, or without a sufficiently simple reliance on the cross, as the medium of acceptance to the guilty ; and the issue is disappointment, mortification, and alarm. With each failure, the question returns, *Wherewithal shall I appear before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God? Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou dost not require, else would I give it.* The effect of these repeated efforts to be free, and of these repeated discomfitures, is exhaustion and dismay. We are not of a mould to endure struggles of this nature long. Left to itself, humanity must soon sink under them. The feeling produced, is like that of the benighted traveller, who only becomes the more bewildered in his strivings to regain the path he has lost ;—like that of the soldier, repulsed again and again from the breach ; or like that of the mariner, who steers his troubled course toward the point that must be passed to enter the haven, and is continually beaten from it by the war of elements against him. And as the prospect of success becomes more and more obscured, the main-spring of exertion is felt to be impaired and failing. The

soul in its weariness, and forebodings of the worst, can do little more perhaps than pray with the afflicted father in the gospel, saying, *If thou canst do any thing, have mercy upon me, and help me.* Or possibly the heart cannot proceed even thus far; but, as in some of the more memorable junctures of human life, in which religious thoughts may have little or no place, the mind becomes depressed with strange forecastings of all conceivable and inconceivable evils.

Why does some unknown force, presaging ill,
Govern my thoughts against their will,
And forms of darkness flit before my eyes?
Why from my lips do words and accents flow
Of unpremeditated woe,
And visions worse than those in dreams arise,
That leave in their illusions no retreat,
And hurl my reason from her seat?

ÆSCHYLUS.

The sinner is deeply sensible that it is his eternal state which is at hazard, and all but lost; and no language can set forth the anguish which the consciousness of this fact has sometimes the power to produce. In the following passage, there is a superstition which belongs not to our age or country, and a strength of expression which few penitents possess; but its depth of feeling scarcely exceeds what many a penitent has known:—

Oh point me thou
Some humblest, painfullest, severest path—
Some new austerity, unheard of yet—
In Syrian fields of glory, or the sands
Of holiest Egypt. Let me bind my brow
With them, and barefoot seek Jerusalem;

Tracking the way with blood; there, day by day
 Inflict upon this guilty flesh the scourge,
 Drink vinegar and gall, and for my bed,
 Hang with extended limbs upon the cross,
 A nightly crucifixion!—any thing
 Of action, difficulty, bodily pain,
 Labour, and outward suffering, any thing
 But stillness, and dread solitude——

SOUTHEY'S *Roderick*.

— any thing we should add, save the torture of a wounded spirit, the burden of the unforgiven, the lost, the hopeless! Oh, how welcome, to such a spirit, must be the sight of HIM, in his infinitude of mercy, who has said, *He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted!*

But the inquirer has heard that the wicked man must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord that he may have mercy upon him; and he has probably laboured to reform his conduct, and to cleanse his spirit; regarding these services as the condition, at least in part, of obtaining the divine favour. But what has the result been? Every step has convinced him increasingly, that if this be the only way of obtaining forgiveness, all hope of his ever possessing it must be vain. Every renewed conviction of this fact exposes him to the danger of entertaining forbidden thoughts of God, and of becoming lost to all delight in the character of his Maker. He is conscious that there is no escape from the hand of the Omnipresent and the Omnipotent; that the men who do not obtain the favour of God, must sink beneath his wrath; and this

thought renders the possibility, or rather *probability*, of his own failure, unutterably awful.

But repentance is the gift of God, and is provided for in his mercy. The delinquent becomes gradually aware, that it is not after this manner, that the overtures of mercy are made in the gospel. He has learnt that two things are needful in his condition—a way of pardon more accessible than that which he has hitherto known, and a power to effect a work of purification in his heart, which he has himself endeavoured in vain. The gospel, rightly understood, meets this state of mind, by declaring the pardon of sin, and the aids of the Holy Spirit, to be strictly, and equally, the gifts of God. It assures the trembling heart, that the mercy of God, which inclines him so abundantly to pardon the returning sinner, has led him to make no less ample provision for that renovation of mind; which can alone dispose the guilty to return; and that it is these two facts taken together, that are designed to operate as an inducement on the wicked man to attempt the forsaking of his ways, and on the unrighteous man to endeavour the cleansing of his thoughts. This was David's hope when he said, *If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. With the Lord there is mercy; with him there is plenteous redemption.* This also was the hope of the same spirit, when looking from himself to his Maker, he prayed, *Create in me a clean heart, O*

God, and renew a right spirit within me. But for these things, saith the Lord, I will be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do them for them.

Thus, that improvement in the outward life, and in the temper of the mind; which the young convert is seeking, and seeking mainly in the hope of then obtaining the divine forgiveness, is a change which must *follow* the pardon of sin, rather than *precede* it. It is the effect of forgiveness, rather than its cause. It is the consequence of our having already trusted in the merits of the Saviour, as our means of acceptance; and not that work, on our own part, which must lead the way to such an exercise of mind. It is when believing that God has had mercy upon us, that we become strong to do, and to suffer, in his cause. It is when assured that he worketh in us both *to will and to do*, that we feel encouraged to *work out our own salvation*. *I shall run in the way of thy commandments*, said David, *when thou hast enlarged my heart*. In other words, when persuaded of thy pardoning mercy for the past, and ever-present help for the future, I shall abound in gratitude, and hope, and in all the activities which gratitude and hope inspire. To the breaking heart of the penitent these better views of truth are as

Land, to the weather-beaten mariner,
Appearing when all hope of land is gone;—
A day that dawns serenely beautiful,
After a night of tempest and of horror;—
A clear rill to the thirsty traveller's lip.

And this is a view of things which the enemy of our spiritual welfare would keep far away from us ; for he has seen its effect. It has never failed to confer liberty on the men whom he carried away captive, and freedom on those he had bound.

We do not, however, mean to intimate, that the mind must be altogether without religious enjoyment, while in a state of considerable ignorance as to the method of salvation. It frequently has delightful impressions of God, and of the nature of religion, even at such times. But this is while it is only partially aware of its obligations. Every new step brings to light some new difficulty ; and if disclosures as to the way of pardon and spiritual aid, were not to keep pace with these discoveries of danger and insufficiency, the result must be despair. But the morning light is now on its passage over the faculties ; and while it gradually reveals to the sinner the perils besetting him, it shines more and more on the path leading to the city of refuge — on the way of entrance to the strong hold provided for *the prisoners of hope*.

It is, at the same time, to be observed, that where there is an intimate knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and the most sincere faith in it, there is not necessarily an end of conflict. Correct views of truth *prepare* us for the christian warfare, they do not supersede it. They merely teach us how to address ourselves to the enterprize before us ; filling us with the animation of hope :—with that courage which is nerved by the anticipations

of a final triumph. The evil passions by which the man was recently enslaved are still in being, somewhat subdued, but not destroyed.

Hence we may remark, that another source of trial connected with repentance is commonly found in THE REMAINING POWER OF THOSE SINFUL INCLINATIONS WHICH ONCE GOVERNED US. The tastes and propensities, by which so much variety is given to the character of mankind, are partly natural and partly acquired. The faculties of different minds seem to vary in their native proportions;—the passions, the imagination, or the reason, being much stronger in some men, even from early life, than in others. And the same difference is observable in regard to the appetites of the body. But these peculiarities, though to a certain extent born with us, become much more prominent by exercise, or indulgence. There are men who live wholly to the gratification of their senses; while others are chiefly influenced by objects having much less of the mere animal in them. These keep under the body, and bring it into subjection, as the consequence of their stronger attachment to pursuits connected with the mind,—such as the employment of the reason, the treasures of learning, the delights of the imagination, the increase of wealth, the allurements of office and power.

But from all these paths of the worldly man, God is excluded. These are the matters to which men render the homage and attachment due only to their Maker. All their capableness of reasoning,

of imagination, of feeling, and of inferior gratification, is from him ; while his law, by which this capableness should be constantly regulated, is set at nought ; and his Nature, which should be ever before them, is put away from their view. And it will be remembered, that the determination with which men are bent on this course of ungodliness, is so spoken of in scripture, as to teach that their repentance is a change which must necessarily involve a painful, and often a protracted warfare. For, as we have seen, to repent, is to place the Most High, and the life which he enjoins, in the room of the world and its numberless attractions. Not indeed to attempt an extinction of all attachment to present things, but to secure a subordination of such things to the claims of the future and eternal, as an act of obedience to his authority who made, and has redeemed us. It is, in short, to do honour to the will of God, as over all ; and to choose the service of holiness, in the place of the service of sin. Now the man who, from some calculating motive, subdues one evil passion only to make way for the indulgence of another, does not accomplish his object without much vigilance and effort — without a *conflict*. But in repentance, we have a change affecting the whole habit of the mind ; the expulsion of an evil habit by its opposite ; the discarding of many long-cherished feelings and practices, in favour of a course of life altogether new. This, accordingly, is not so much a change of particular

indulgences, or even of habits, as a change of nature. To use the forcible language of scripture, it is to wash the Ethiopian white, and to take from the leopard his spots — *to cut off the right hand, or to pluck out the right eye*. It is the *dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow*.

This contest with remaining sinfulness belongs to the experience of the Christian during the whole of his pilgrimage, but has special force in connexion with the early stage of his piety. His corruptions are like an enemy long accustomed to rule, and whose pride spurns at the thought of being easily, if ever, subdued. Hence they return to the field after repeated discomfitures; and, sometimes, with a concentrated violence, which threatens to bear every thing before it. Some of these onsets leave the christian soldier in breathless exhaustion; and though not yet borne down by them, he is perhaps heard exclaiming, *I shall surely one day fall*. But he has a better counsellor than his fears; and there is a stronger arm with him than his own. He remembers the promises of his God. *My grace shall be sufficient for thee; my strength shall be perfect in thy weakness. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*. He remembers the all-attractive character under which the Being who thus speaks to him is revealed; and the freedom with which the offers of forgiveness, and spiritual help, are placed before him. He looks not only to the nature of God, but to the glories of that world

in which God is enthroned ; to the felicities of that multitude who there bow before him ; to the fact, that the just there made perfect, have been brought thither in virtue of that very mediation, and those very promises, in which he is himself confiding ; and he remembers that the arm of mercy which removed their guilt, is not shortened that it cannot save ; and that the mysterious grace which has so wondrously purified and ennobled them, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Thus God appears to him a nobler object than all created good ; the attractions of earth are surpassed by the endearments of heaven ; and every faculty in the soul—the sovereignty there—is secured on the side of the invisible and everlasting. To be excluded from the protection and blessing of God ;—to be shut out from the world in which the glories of the Most High are unveiled, and where the joys of his presence are felt,—the bare thought is not to be endured. Hence, notwithstanding all his conscious guilt and weakness, the language of the heart, in the case of the struggling penitent, often is, — “ O thou Maker of earth and heaven, all thy works praise thee ! thou who dwellest in light, which no man hath seen, or can see, thou Saviour of men, how wonderful is thy majesty, how great is thy goodness, how tender is thy mercy !—and shall my lot be with those who will never see thy glory, never rest beneath the sunshine of thy perfect love, who are enemies to thee, and chained to their wretchedness by thy righteous displeasure ?—

O forbid it, mighty, merciful, all-mighty, all-merciful Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier ! Let trial come, if so it please thee,—war, dreadful war ; but let strength also come to bear it all, to triumph over all, and thine, thine alone, shall the praise be, the glory ever be !”

Such are, not unfrequently, the exercises of the repenting man ; and from these he rises, as with new life diffused through his nature,—his heart is no longer tremulous, and his right hand is no longer that of the feeble.

The warfare of the penitent man is sometimes aggravated by THE CONDUCT OF HIS CONNEXIONS. This difficulty occurs with peculiar force, where the change experienced has been sudden, and marked in its character. It will, in such instances, be deemed strange that we run not to our old excess of riot. And it would be well if such persons did no more than wonder ;—but they learn to hate the change. This they must do, in proportion to its genuineness, and to their own spirit of irreligion. They may bear with it, until it deprive them of society which they wish to retain ; until it censure the negligences into which they are disposed to fall ; or until it condemn the vanities and the vices which they are not willing to abandon. But when matters proceed thus far, one of two things must follow,—either this religious mania, as it is called, must be expelled, or the society of the new convert must be regarded as lost, or, perhaps, worse than lost. Sometimes every mean is em-

ployed to reclaim him. Argument, ridicule, threatening, persuasion—all are laid under contribution. The person exposed to this varied assault, may appear little qualified to meet it. From his recent acquaintance with religious things, he may not always be capable of detecting the sophistry which it is attempted to impose on him. Ridicule may wound him exceedingly; and though generally proof against threatening, he has some difficulty in withstanding persuasion. These opponents, meeting him in his own household, and in the circle of friendship, may have much in their character entitling them to his esteem and affection; and this circumstance cannot fail to render his opposition to them especially painful.

But the man who, having *put his hand to the plough, looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God*. Whosoever shall prefer father, or mother, or wife, or land, before the Saviour who died for him, is unworthy of him. The mind which cannot hazard the dearest friendship for the sake of that Benefactor, who said, *Henceforth I call you not servants but friends*, must be content to forego his friendship *who sticketh closer than a brother*.

The enlightened penitent is not ignorant of these facts, nor unmindful of their import. He is aware that all the relations and friendships of the present world are founded, more or less, on passing circumstances, which time will soon sweep away as a spider's web. He is not insensible that the bonds of attachment, which will last the longest, and be

productive of immeasurably the greatest good, are those called forth among Christians by the gospel—the instrument which rescues them from their common ruin, and appoints them their portion of blessedness in the common salvation. These are bonds which must be strengthened by death, and will only attain to their perfection when we are removed from the earth, and time shall be no more. As the feeling of these spiritual relations takes its true hold upon the heart, the young Christian becomes willing to bear those losses, in the way of social kindness, which are found attendant on the beginning of the course before him. The essence of our doctrine on this point is taught by the Saviour in these words,—*Whoso shall do the will of my Father, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.* Thus the bonds of the christian brotherhood, should partake of all the strength and tenderness of the dearest natural relationships.

This may be more the language of heaven, than of earth; but the gospel has more to do with heaven, than with earth. It does not check social or relative feeling; on the contrary, all such affections are refined, and generally strengthened by it: but it gives being to a fraternal sympathy, to a communion of griefs, and joys, and hopes, which believers feel to be all its own. Hence the argument of the apostle, that if Jesus laid down his life for us, *we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren.* Thus the friendships which religion

inspires, relating, as they do, to the largest interests of this world and the next, are so far understood and felt, as to render the Christian, in no small measure, independent of present connexions. His social sympathies have a sphere of their own. It is deemed better to be related to the family in heaven, than to possess the proudest possible descent on earth. To be a member of the household of faith, and a child of God, are regarded as elevations having consequences attached to them, which should lead every man to seek after them, though at the cost, as in the case of Moses, of the favour of kings, or of the riches of an empire.

We must not omit to observe, that the change now considered, is narrowly watched by our great adversary, and that THE TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN form another source of the difficulties by which it is beset. There is not an arrow at his bidding, which we have not reason to expect will be employed against us, during this stage of our conflict. Our sins he will, perhaps, represent as too many, and too enormous, ever to be forgiven; or, if this should fail, it will perhaps be suggested that they are so few and trivial, that anything approaching to alarm, on their account, must indicate a childish weakness. It is the same with everything affecting the state of the heart. At one time it may be insinuated, that its depravity is such as to render the thought of its ever being fitted for heaven altogether visionary; and at no distant period, it will possibly be affirmed, that the frailties

chargeable upon it, are so unimportant, as to make any great moral alteration in it manifestly unnecessary. By expedients thus opposite, and all equally false, will this enemy harass the spirit, while in the act of turning from his service, to that of the Father of Lights. The sight on which angels look with so much interest, and joyous anticipation, is regarded by Satan, and his emissaries, with hatred, rage, and dark foreboding,—*for there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

It is now proper to inquire, do we know what this warfare, connected with repentance, means? There are many who have passed through all we have described, and more than all. Such persons derive no small encouragement from learning that the conflicts of others, in this respect, have resembled their own. They cannot forget, that repentance is the command of God; that it is *the gift of God*; that it must, in the nature of things, be pleasing to God. They are moreover aware, that a spirit of penitence should have its place within us, not only at the commencement of our religious course, but through every after state of our pilgrimage. Our days never cease to be days of folly, and evil; and should never cease to be days of penitential sorrow. We are reminded of this humiliating fact, when required to pray for the forgiveness of our daily trespasses; and there is nothing we should so much deplore, as an

insensibility to the obligations to daily contrition, under which these are constantly placing us.

But there are some who have never repented, who have deferred it till a more convenient season, and, by every such act, have added a new cord to their bondage. They have, perhaps, flattered themselves with the prospect of living to a good old age; and when they shall perceive that their removal from this world cannot be far distant, they mean to relinquish certain of its pleasures and pursuits, and to prepare for the change before them. But what authority has any man to calculate on a good old age? And even considering this to have been granted, where do men learn that their worldliness is a matter to be thrown off the more readily, the longer it has been indulged? Is it the tendency of evil habit to weaken the vassalage of corruption? Is not its effect rather to render this thralldom as a chain of adamant? It is true, there are excesses, both of youth and manhood, to which old age must be unequal; and the heart often persuades itself, that the degree of thoughtfulness and moderation which necessity has imposed, has been the result of choice. But can we fail to see the lie in the right hand of these wretched triflers? Is it from this miserable device—a device which casts so much insult, and base mockery, upon the Omniscient, and the Most Holy,—that men can derive hope? Will he be satisfied with a little outward abstinence, while the mind retains all its guilty enmities against

him? Go, man, to the father that begat thee, and will he be pleased with the outward submission, which flows from no sentiment of reverence, no feeling of attachment? Would he not loathe it, would he not reprobate thy state as monstrous? And is it a less homage that is due to your Father in heaven? Will he bestow a place in his own glorious world, on a nature which is thus without one element of fitness for its fellowship, its employments, its blessedness? This is the decree—awful indeed, but just as it is awful—*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* In the nature of things it must be so. Heaven is the element of purity;—the impure cannot live there. Its air is not suited to their kind of life. But let it be considered well, that Jesus is exalted to *give* repentance, along with the *remission of sins.*

CHAP. VI.

ON THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PRIVATE DEVOTION.

Prayer ardent, opens heaven, lets down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man, in audience with the DEITY.
Who worships the GREAT GOD, that instant joins
The first in heaven, and sets his foot on hell.

YOUNG.

THE religion of the Bible is not such as man would have devised. It discloses much which human nature would conceal, and insists on many things which all men are concerned to evade. It weighs the spirits of our race in a balance of its own, and declares them wanting, awfully wanting. Its main scrutiny is directed to the heart :—against that, its most alarming accusations are preferred. We are ever disposed to separate between the action and the motive ; resting, with respect to matters of duty, in what is seen, and careless of what is unseen ; satisfied with outward conformity, in the place of inward homage ; being too ready, even in our best state, to substitute a form of godliness in the room of the power of it. All this is

smitten, as at its lowest root, by the religion of holy scripture. Its most solemn admonitions relate to duties, of which man can neither be the witness nor the judge. These duties consist in certain exercises of the reason, and of the affections, which the eye of the Omniscient alone can see. To these, the Being, who alone can search the heart, is described as attaching the highest value; and this, not merely because they refer to our chief obligations with regard to himself, but because they tend pre-eminently to the emancipation of the soul from the bondage of the flesh, and to its advancement in what constitutes its meetness for a world of spirits,—the felicities of the blessed. The gospel has something nobler than earth in reserve for us, and would therefore teach us to live in a nobler element than may be found in the present world. It enjoins thankfulness on account of present mercies, but forbids satisfaction with them. Not to enjoy them, is to be considered monstrous; to desire nothing better, is to be classed with the brute—or, in truth, to sink lower, since *the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib*. To remove this unnatural ignorance, and to bring men back to a due and happy acknowledgment of the divine claims, is the great design of the gospel; and the practice of secret prayer, is an important branch of the means by which this return is to be promoted, and its effects rendered permanent.

In viewing the Christian Warfare as connected with Private Devotion, we shall offer a few pre-

CHAP. VI.

ON THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PRIVATE DEVOTION.

Prayer ardent, opens heaven, lets down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man, in audience with the DEITY.
Who worships the GREAT GOD, that instant joins
The first in heaven, and sets his foot on hell.

YOUNG.

THE religion of the Bible is not such as man would have devised. It discloses much which human nature would conceal, and insists on many things which all men are concerned to evade. It weighs the spirits of our race in a balance of its own, and declares them wanting, awfully wanting. Its main scrutiny is directed to the heart :—against that, its most alarming accusations are preferred. We are ever disposed to separate between the action and the motive ; resting, with respect to matters of duty, in what is seen, and careless of what is unseen ; satisfied with outward conformity, in the place of inward homage ; being too ready, even in our best state, to substitute a form of godliness in the room of the power of it. All this is

who, to be alone, seeks the secluded meadow, or the sheltered forest; who chooses the shade of the fig-tree, as Nathaniel did; or the house-top, after the example of Peter; the centinel, who treads the space appointed him during the hours of night; or the mariner, who gazes in the deep silence of that season on the boundless waters and the starry heavens,—all these may readily act in the spirit of the injunction, *Pray to thy Father in secret*. Wherever there is solitude, or seclusion, there is the place intended by the Saviour, when he said, *Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door*.

And where is the Christian who has this to learn? Where is the believer who can forget the aids which his better feelings have derived in such scenes from the silence, the sounds, the beauties, the vastness of the works of God? Art, in its sublimest exhibitions, has become poor and trivial before the wonderfulness of nature; and nature has appeared as though robed in a greatness and a loveliness altogether new, because seen through the medium of revelation,—the messenger whose tidings have added so much to our knowledge, respecting the majesty and the loving-kindness of its Great Parent.

The obligation to avail ourselves of these kinds, and, indeed, of every kind of seclusion that may favour private devotion, is farther manifest, from the **EXAMPLE OF DEVOUT MEN IN EVERY AGE**. We see, from the days of the patriarch to those of the apostles, that men of prayer never failed to esteem

the liberty of their solitary approaches to the throne of God, as their dearest privilege. It was Isaac's manner to go into the fields toward evening-tide to meditate. Moses communed with God, as a man with his friend. David found it a refuge in all his troubles. Daniel hazarded his life rather than relinquish it. And how often does Paul speak of his daily prayers for the Christians to whom his epistles were addressed.

But this duty comes to us, enforced by an example, which should be more impressive than that of Isaac, Daniel, or Paul. Even the innocent Saviour, is described by Matthew, as retiring after a day of great labour, into A MOUNTAIN APART TO PRAY; and the evangelist adds, that when the evening was come, he was there alone. Nor was it too much for him, sometimes, to pass the whole night in such retreats, *offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears.*

Thus, private devotion is an unquestionable duty; a duty, the performance of which brings us into spiritual association with the devout men of all ages, and into a state of special conformity to the teaching, and the pattern, of Jesus himself; who, on this point, has evidently left us an example, that we should tread in his steps.

The exact SPACE THAT SHOULD BE GIVEN TO SUCH EXERCISES, is a question which the scriptures do not determine by any specific rule. This is left to be proportioned, in the instance of individuals, by circumstances, as is the case with most of our

who, to be alone, seeks the secluded meadow, or the sheltered forest; who chooses the shade of the fig-tree, as Nathaniel did; or the house-top, after the example of Peter; the centinel, who treads the space appointed him during the hours of night; or the mariner, who gazes in the deep silence of that season on the boundless waters and the starry heavens,—all these may readily act in the spirit of the injunction, *Pray to thy Father in secret*. Wherever there is solitude, or seclusion, there is the place intended by the Saviour, when he said, *Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door*.

And where is the Christian who has this to learn? Where is the believer who can forget the aids which his better feelings have derived in such scenes from the silence, the sounds, the beauties, the vastness of the works of God? Art, in its sublimest exhibitions, has become poor and trivial before the wonderfulness of nature; and nature has appeared as though robed in a greatness and a loveliness altogether new, because seen through the medium of revelation,—the messenger whose tidings have added so much to our knowledge, respecting the majesty and the loving-kindness of its Great Parent.

The obligation to avail ourselves of these kinds, and, indeed, of every kind of seclusion that may favour private devotion, is farther manifest, from the **EXAMPLE OF DEVOUT MEN IN EVERY AGE**. We see, from the days of the patriarch to those of the apostles, that men of prayer never failed to esteem

the liberty of their solitary approaches to the throne of God, as their dearest privilege. It was Isaac's manner to go into the fields toward evening-tide to meditate. Moses communed with God, as a man with his friend. David found it a refuge in all his troubles. Daniel hazarded his life rather than relinquish it. And how often does Paul speak of his daily prayers for the Christians to whom his epistles were addressed.

But this duty comes to us, enforced by an example, which should be more impressive than that of Isaac, Daniel, or Paul. Even the innocent Saviour, is described by Matthew, as retiring after a day of great labour, into A MOUNTAIN APART TO PRAY; and the evangelist adds, that when the evening was come, he was there alone. Nor was it too much for him, sometimes, to pass the whole night in such retreats, *offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears.*

Thus, private devotion is an unquestionable duty; a duty, the performance of which brings us into spiritual association with the devout men of all ages, and into a state of special conformity to the teaching, and the pattern, of Jesus himself; who, on this point, has evidently left us an example; that we should tread in his steps.

The exact SPACE THAT SHOULD BE GIVEN TO SUCH EXERCISES, is a question which the scriptures do not determine by any specific rule. This is left to be proportioned, in the instance of individuals, by circumstances, as is the case with most of our

duties. There are no duties that should be allowed to supersede private prayer; but there are many that should be allowed to affect the space, or limits, assigned to it. One great end proposed in the devotions of the closet is, that we should carry the savour of them into the church and the world. We are not to *forsake the assembling of ourselves together*; but are rather to *exhort each other daily while it is called to-day*. We are not to fly from the world, but to overcome it. Thus that love of God, which is the great element of closet devotion, is to manifest itself in our greater love of the brethren, and in our more expansive charity toward all men. Our piety is not to be that of the ancient pharisee, who never entered his closet and shut his door, that he might worship; nor is it to be that of the ancient monk, who professed to do little else. The day, surely, should never pass, without an exercise of this kind; and when our minds are in anything approaching toward a proper frame, it is hardly one little interval so occupied that will suffice. We learn that Daniel, amid all the splendours and jealousies of a court, was used to separate himself three times a day, that he might *pray and give thanks*. And David says, *Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud*.

Daniel speaks, in the passage above cited, of giving THANKS, in his retirement, and not merely of praying. And, in any consideration of the nature of private devotion, it must be perceived,

that it is not meant to be wholly occupied with supplication.

Were the apostle of the Gentiles to advise on this subject, he would, no doubt, say, as he did to Timothy, *Give attention to READING*. And this reading should be the Bible, always, and chiefly, though not, perhaps, exclusively. There are many, and sometimes important questions, arising out of a perusal of the scriptures, which the scriptures themselves were not designed to answer. It certainly is not well with us, if the Bible be not our favourite book; but so long as we value religious conversation with our friends, and religious discourse from the pulpit, it is not easy to see why a religious book may not be a companion of the closet. These are all means of the same kind; and, under the divine blessing, often serve to deepen the impression made by inspired truth.

If Paul were near us also, when thus employing our solitude, there is another of his counsels to Timothy, which he would perhaps repeat to us—*CONSIDER what I say unto thee, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things*. The duty of consideration is especially incumbent upon us at such seasons. We should then meditate on what we read, search for its full import, as for hidden treasure; and do our utmost, that it may be faithfully applied. We should recall the past, examine the present, anticipate the future. Without effort of this kind, the spirit will be little moved, perhaps, though professing to separate itself from earth, and

to make its solemn entry into the presence chamber of the Great King. There is nothing to which we are more averse, than to this part of closet duty. It is easier to read, it is easier even to pray, than it is to *think*—to reflect, or meditate. Of this our spiritual adversary is well aware; and he is also aware of the losses, and injuries, to which this guilty lethargy is constantly exposing us.

But in our reading, and in our thoughtfulness, the same end is to be kept in view. It is that we may be constrained to bow the knee before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in a state of soul becoming us. It is that we may pray wisely, and feelingly; and that we may give thanks with grateful hearts. It is that, from correct views of ourselves and of our God, of our wants and of his willingness to supply them, we may be led to approach him in humble penitence, and in filial confidence and love. David said, *I will sing praises unto my God, while I have my being; my meditation of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord. Amid the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.* The mind susceptible of these sentiments is the only happy one; and rarely does the Christian possess them in so large a measure, as amid the stillness of private thought, of secret aspiration.

II. In adverting to the Christian warfare as connected with this duty, we may observe that a very general cause, among the many which prevent its

due performance, is A LOW STATE OF SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION AND FEELING. There are seasons when the Bible fails to attract its proper share of attention, even in the instance of sincere Christians ; and when its influence on the heart, is so faint and dubious, as to be hardly perceptible ;—when spiritual things seem almost as though they were not, and when even the sabbath proves a weariness ;—when the soul would seem to be falling back into its former state, as being, along with the body, *of the earth, earthy*. In our natural state, if secret prayers are ever offered, the spirit of prayer must certainly have been wanting. And in every interval of declension, after we have passed from that state, it is the coldness, the irregularity, or, perhaps, the total neglect of private prayer, which affords the earliest indication of our guilt and danger. That part of religion which is seen of men, may remain much as it was ; while, for a considerable space, that which is only seen of God has been descending toward the point of extinction. A fearful sleep may have come over the faculties, and the chill of spiritual death be upon them. The causes which too frequently produce this state of mind among Christians, are various ; and so, of course, are the means by which we should seek to counteract them.

It is hardly doubtful, that, in some cases, effects of this nature may be traced, at least in part, to the disproportionate attention which is given to public duties. The attention we mean is of course that, which is manifestly incompatible with an

adequate regard to more private obligations. It is sometimes much easier to be employed in putting the church and the world right, than in putting ourselves right. There may be many things without, that need reforming; but often as we are reminded of the danger of forgetting, we still do forget, that reformation is a work which should begin at home. It is not always borne in mind, that a zeal for charitable or religious objects, is not of necessity the same thing with a zeal for charity, or religion. And even where there is a mixture of good and enlightened motive, such employments may so absorb the attention and feelings, as to render the man a comparative stranger to his own heart; and this is a delinquency, that must carry spiritual declension along with it, and one for which no amount of public service can atone. It is promised indeed, that those who water others, shall themselves be watered. But it is not promised that the unweeded, the neglected garden, should be fruitful.

It must, at the same time, be confessed, that an excess of public spirit is not the besetting sin of our nature. We have much more to apprehend from selfish indolence, or from an excessive application to such pursuits as involve our personal interest. Still there is often room to fear, lest we should be found substituting the bustle, and applause, of public engagements, in the place of the less ostentatious, and more laborious duties, of thoughtfulness, self-examination, and supplication before God.

THE CARES, AND VEXATIONS, OF WORLDLY EMPLOYMENTS constitute another frequent occasion of deadness to religious objects; and of consequent incapacity to participate, largely, in the benefits of private devotion. The mind becomes strongly imbued with the element to which it is inured; and, in the case now adverted to, the effect must often be, a perplexed understanding, and an enfeebled heart. There are pursuits, moreover, which are above the ordinary level of worldly occupation, but which have the same kind of danger attendant upon them. We refer to employments of a more intellectual character, such as those of literature, science, and art. These have a power to abstract the mind from much of what is earthly; but, unhappily, they have the same potency to exclude the thoughts and emotions that should connect us with the heavenly. Every good man, who has possessed the ability and concentration necessary to excel in such things, has been painfully alive to this fact.

But of all the causes producing that deadness of spirit, which disqualifies us for communion with God, the most perilous, IS KNOWN SINFUL INDULGENCE. Men will not often fail to hate their enemies; but, it generally happens, that they hate those whom they have deeply injured still more. This results, in part, from that self-reproach, which the recollection of such conduct must awaken; and sometimes from the fear of that resentment, which is felt to have been justly incurred. Now

sin is an injury done to God; and the consciousness of having done it, not only tends to weaken every principle and feeling of piety, but to dispose the offender, unless sincerely penitent, to restrain prayer,—to attempt an avoidance of his Maker's presence, after the manner of the first transgressor. To trifle with sin, is, of necessity, to lose our relish for devotion.

If such are the causes, which very commonly produce spiritual apathy, and unfitness for secret worship, how are they to be counteracted? Should there not be a more careful attention bestowed on the relative claims of our various employments? Have we not reason to suspect, that the frequent substitution of any kind of public, or even of family duty, in the place of private reading, self-investigation, and calling upon God, is the work of our subtle adversary? We cannot pretend that such duties, important as they may be, can furnish any valid excuse for the neglect of a certain, and most sacred obligation. We must be aware also, if we are Christians, that such a derangement of the revealed appointments of infinite wisdom and benevolence, could never be assented to by us, were we as enlightened and spiritual as we should be. There are not wanting examples of men, who have been, in an eminent degree, the laborious benefactors of their race, and, at the same time, habitual and fervent in their devotion,—at home, alike, in the field of honourable exertion, and in the solitude of private intercourse with heaven. Thus the

prayers and the alms of Cornelius went up together before God. Thus the apostle of the Gentiles, who exceeded all his brethren in activity, was not behind one of them, in *bowing his knee, before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. And when he required Christians to be *diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*, he well knew that he did not mock their weakness, by urging what was impossible.

There are two expedients, which have especially served to keep alive a prayerful state of mind, amid the pressure, and distraction, occasioned by present things. These consist, in a determination to have a fixed season for the exercise adverted to; and also, in an effort to bring the mind into the habit of seizing on the smallest fragments of time, for the purpose of presenting those brief aspirations, or broken petitions, which frequently ascend acceptably to heaven, from the most crowded and hurried scenes of our world.

If no season be fixed upon, as that which shall be scrupulously given to private devotion, the probability is fearfully on the side of its being wholly neglected; or, at best, only very partially, and unhappily performed. If the thought be entertained, that there are other engagements, which may justify, even an occasional omission of this duty, it may be safely concluded that such engagements will prove of very frequent occurrence. Leave it as a thing to be done at any time, and it will generally remain undone. Allow that other

things may often, and justly, supersede it; and there is little room to doubt, that it will be superseded altogether.

Nor is it possible to say how much we lose, by not availing ourselves of those little seasons, which the busiest day of life affords, to offer ejaculatory supplication and thanksgiving. Amid the tumult raised by his murderers, Stephen could utter his brief and memorable petition—*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge—Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!* Thus Hannah sent her entreaties to heaven, with the silence and rapidity of thought, speaking in her heart though her voice was not heard.

And in effecting a transition from our employments to our devotions, it may be well to remember that the scriptures supply many themes of meditation, strictly suited to persons thus occupied. If we are busied in the paths of public usefulness, how natural should be the extending of our thoughts to Him, who *went about doing good; who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich; who gave himself for us, that he might purify us, and present us as a sweet-smelling savour unto God!* Surely we could not pass thus, from our own humble efforts, to his great example, and not find ourselves at once in that presence which calls forth every devotional feeling. If pressed by labour, and care, and sorrow, how great were the toil, the anxiety, the grief of Him who has called us to tread in his steps! and how appropriate those words, *Your heavenly*

Father knoweth you have need of such things! If employed in more elevated pursuits, such as task the memory, the reason, the imagination, and the feelings to the utmost; what should be more easy, than to rise still upwards, to the contemplation of that Mind by which all things are known and nothing forgotten; before which the perceptions and the feelings of taste, are as the inexperience of infancy; and the achievements of art, in their most amazing combinations of sublimity or beauty, are as the structures of humblest childhood? Should the benevolent find it difficult to converse with Him who was benevolence in its perfectness? Should the occupied doubt of sympathy in His nature, the labours of whose ministry were, in their weight, and their multitude, almost incredible? Should the intellectual regard devotion as a hard and unreasonable service, while it simply leads them to a nearer view of the loftiest intelligence, to a contemplation of the marvellous exhibition of it in the vastness and loveliness of the universe, and of its more wonderful disclosures in the worlds of grace and glory? Is it not rather apparent, that private devotion is the link, especially formed to connect the poor charities of earth, with the unsullied benevolence of heaven; the wearisome labours of time, with the blissful activities of eternity; and the noblest culture of the human faculties below, with their happier development, and their still nobler achievements, in the world above?

Every close observer of his own spirit must

perceive, that aids of this nature are of great importance toward the maintenance of that habit of mind, which has its treasure in heaven.

————— 'Tis a thing impossible to frame
 Conceptions equal to the Soul's desires;
 And the most difficult of tasks to *keep*
 Heights which the soul is competent to gain.
 Man is of dust: ethereal hopes are his,
 Which, when they should sustain themselves aloft,
 Want due consistence: like a pillar of smoke,
 That with majestic energy from earth
 Rises; but having reached the thinner air,
 Melts, and dissolves, and is no longer seen.

WORDSWORTH.

It is by means, and by reflections, of the nature now adverted to, that Christians are preserved, under the blessing of their Lord, from being perpetually ensnared to a low state of spiritual perception and feeling.

But all that we have hitherto said, refers to such a state, as being the result of excessive occupation, in reference to things not in themselves unlawful. When the state described is occasioned by any thing positively sinful, the malady assumes a different character, and should be subject to a different treatment. With respect to such cases, thus much at least is plain,—instead of restraining prayer, we should study to abound in it the more. If we have fallen more into the power of the enemy, and have more sins needing to be forgiven, assuredly we should increase in supplication before the divine throne, and especially in the humility and fervour of secret entreaty. We are in greater danger of

being lost, and should look with greater earnestness and vigilance to Him who is able to save, and who can alone save. Ere long, the offending Christian is made sensible of these things. His apathy gives place, perhaps, to deep spiritual suffering; and, in the language of the prophet, he returns *with weeping and supplication* to the paths he had forsaken. With a memorable backslider, he prays, *Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation; take not thy Holy Spirit from me.*

Another source of trial connected with private devotion is THE WANT OF FAITH. This principle, if such it may be called, varies both in its quality and degree. There is a faith that hates the truth which it cannot resist. Such is the faith of fallen angels, and such is that of a large portion of mankind. But this cannot be saving faith. Even the faith of those who are strictly believers, is liable to great variousness as to its amount, and its admixtures. We have seen, in a preceding chapter, that, in every mind, there are evils alien from faith, and at war with it; and that, from these causes, it is ever liable to serious modifications. We read, accordingly, of *little* faith, and *great* faith, of *weak* faith, and *strong* faith, and of a *full assurance of faith*. There may be faith enough in regard to the obligation of secret prayer, to prevent a man from wholly neglecting it; and, at the same time, not enough to lead him to pray acceptably. His conscience may tell him, that without secret prayer, it is in vain to suppose that he is a Christian; and

it may tell him what the things are which he should ask in secret. But these may, after all, be things which he does not expect, which he does not really wish, to obtain. He is not willing to meet the conflict necessary to his becoming, what he would seem to have prayed that he may become; and it is not always easy to distinguish between this predominance of faithlessness in an unconverted mind, and its occasional influence over the regenerate. There have been men, whose piety has risen above all suspicion, in whom a spirit of doubting, with respect to the most vital truths, has acquired an alarming power, and continued through a considerable space of time. When, from causes of this kind, the mind is conscious of asking for what it can hardly be said to expect will be conferred, it is impossible that it should long be satisfied with itself; and there is danger lest it should neglect an exercise altogether, to which it finds itself so generally unequal.

But supposing such a man to be indeed without faith, his obligation to seek it by prayer, as the promised gift of God, remains unaltered. If we possess but a little faith, it is His power only that can make it great. And if disturbed by speculative difficulties, and suggestions, our prayers are addressed to the God of truth, mightier than the father of lies:—and to whom should we go but unto him? If our hearts testify the word of the Almighty to be a good word, all that is doing, may be meant to show, whether we are prepared to

follow it as such, through pain as well as pleasure, during the hidings of the divine countenance, as well as beneath its sunshine.. The trial of Abraham, was not only a trial of his faith, but of all those holy dispositions from which faith derives so much of its being and stableness. So, also, it was with another patriarch, when he said, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.* The best evidence of our possessing faith, is our continuance in the practice of those duties which God, the great object of faith, has enjoined; and the more difficulties are overcome, in such a course, the stronger is the evidence, not only of our having faith, but of our having it in a considerable degree. The dark day, in this respect, is a better test than the light one; and is no doubt intended to render the light of the future, both on earth and beyond it, the more cheering and abundant.

These observations lead to the remark, that another occasion of discouragement, in relation to this duty, is THE WANT OF FERVENT AND PLEASURABLE FEELING IN PERFORMING IT. Now it is not to be doubted, that a listless uninterested frame in private devotion, is often the effect of a state of unregeneracy; or of some forbidden indulgence in the instance of believers. But we sometimes find the same evil deplored, on the part of men whose piety has been the most enlightened and extraordinary; and deplored by them, under circumstances, which force upon us the conclusion, that the spiritual joy denied to one believer, and

the earthly good withholden from another, are parts of an arrangement proceeding from the same sovereignty; and that they neither of them decide any thing, taken alone, as to our real state in relation to eternity.

We know that, in general, the Christian would not barter the enjoyments which he has found in prayer, for all the pleasures of the world. Nevertheless, if prayer were always easy and delightful, mere selfishness would be enough to render us assiduous in it. There could not then have been the least need of the Saviour's admonition, that *Men ought always to pray and not to faint*; nor of the many scriptures which require us *to watch unto prayer with all perseverance*. This language supposes difficulty and discouragement, such as it may require all our wisdom and all our energy to surmount. And it must be obvious that there is a deeper sense of duty, a greater strength of religious principle shown, by continuing instant in prayer, when there is little pleasure experienced, than when it is found to carry a kind of reward immediately along with it. As our poverty does not prove our want of Christianity, neither does this conclusion follow from our having seasons of much spiritual depression. Both are appointments of sovereign wisdom; and, where our religious privations are not the consequence of any peculiar sinfulness, both are designed to furnish a test to our spirit of resignation, our constancy, and our obedience. Ministers of the gospel would fain be

successful; their great anxiety should rather be, that they may be found faithful. Christians are earnest to obtain religious peacefulness and comfort; they should be more concerned to evince a patient continuance in well-doing. Here is the safety of the pastor, and here the safety of his flock.

Another occasion of discouragement, sometimes of intense sorrow, in connexion with private devotion, is THE APPARENT WANT OF AN ANSWER TO PRAYER. On this point, our guilty ignorance with regard to the word of God, is not unfrequently visited with direct and manifest punishment. God designs that the judgment and feeling of his people should be regulated by his word, taken as a whole, and by a comparison of scripture with scripture. But men fix their attention on particular passages, and found expectations upon them, which would have been altogether prevented, or greatly modified, by comparing them with others. Thus it is written, *Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.* The meaning of this text, considered alone, would not seem to admit of dispute. The scriptures, however, taken as a whole, teach, beyond all reasonable doubt, that God will only give *good things* to his servants; that he alone knows what is good for them; and that his views, as to what will most conduce to our welfare, are, commonly, at direct variance with our own. Who then shall be the sovereign? Shall our lot be considered as dependent on our prayers, or as at His disposal who *ordereth all things after the counsel of his own will*? There is much involved in this

question. Not to mention other particulars, it is certain that we should never choose affliction, while God often appoints it. And while we are always anxious to convert religion into a source of mere pleasure, he not unfrequently renders it an endurance of hardship. Is it not manifest, then, that our prayers, with regard to *all* worldly things, and in regard to not a few spiritual things, should be conditional,—offered with a reserved submission of our short-sighted selfishness, to the wise and gracious sovereignty above us? When the Redeemer assures us, therefore, that whatsoever we shall ask in faith we shall receive, he can only have referred to such things as it may behove God to bestow, and be to our interest to receive. There are, no doubt, many important benefits for which we may pray without a condition,—indeed those for which we may thus pray, are unspeakably the most important, such as the forgiveness of our sins through the cross of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit; that we may grow in holiness, and manifest the power of divine truth in our conduct and character. We may, doubtless, pray unconditionally, that God would cause us to glorify him on earth, and bring us at last to his heavenly kingdom. But the manner in which this may be best accomplished, we have to leave wholly with Him whose counsels are *well ordered in all things, and sure*. Hence to fix our mind on any special gift, whether of providence or grace, and to work ourselves into the persuasion, that if we seek it in th, it will surely be ours—such conduct, instead

of being the evidence of great spiritual excellence, is the melancholy proof of spiritual ignorance, and of that spiritual presumption to which such ignorance will naturally lead. How different the conduct of Jesus, even in his most trying hour! *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me—nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* This is the spirit which should pervade all our supplications, except when referring to such essential blessings as we have noticed.

At the same time, it is never to be assumed, that we have prayed in vain, because what we have sought has not been vouchsafed. The very exercise of prayer, though conducted under much mistaken impression, has in it an element of good; and the Almighty, while withholding what would be injurious, bestows, in answer to it, what may prove more conducive to our interests. Paul entreated, once and again, that the thorn in his flesh should be removed, but it remained till his death. Still he did not supplicate in vain. *My strength shall be perfect in thy weakness,* was the answer obtained; and he received grace to bear the evil of which he would fain have been free, and to profit by it. It is the same to this day, and the light of eternity will shew, that the prayer of the heart has never been breathed in vain—that the Most High, while seeming to disregard the supplications of his servants, has been ever answering them; but answering them in a way, greatly above what they, in their ignorance and feebleness, could ask or think.

CHAP. VII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PUBLIC DUTY.

O for a world in principle as chaste
As this is gross and selfish! —————

COWPER.

Look not every man upon his own things, but every man also on the things of others. These words imply, that even among professing Christians, there is a frequent proneness to become so far occupied with their own interests, as to overlook the interests of others. They teach us also, that this is an evil proneness, against which it behoves us to guard with the utmost care. We propose, in this chapter, to consider the Christian warfare as connected with public duty; and to the completeness of this subject, it will be necessary to contemplate our obligations, in regard to it, under three points of view:—its Claims, its Limits, and its Difficulties, equally deserve our attention.

I. With respect to the Claims of public duty,
THEY ARE FOUNDED ON THE COMMAND OF GOD.

The scripture we have just cited, does not express the mere counsel, or advice, of a fallible mortal. It is the announcement of one who spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost,—the mandate of the Eternal. The sacred writers inculcate attention to the temporal necessities of our fellow-men, as an imperative obligation. *Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* It is thus distinctly taught, that where benevolence is wanting, piety is wanting. Such men as fail to befriend the hungry and the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, are placed before us, by the Redeemer himself, as the person on whom a sentence of everlasting exclusion from all blessedness, will be publicly pronounced in the great day. Indeed, the law which enjoins, that *we do to others as we would they should do to us*, calls upon the rich to relieve the real necessities of the poor, and on the strong to become the protectors of the weak. As interpreted by the Saviour, in the parable of the Samaritan, this precept teaches us to recognize our neighbour in every child of Adam, and having done this, it says, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*.

We scarcely need observe, that this law, so accordant with the precepts of scripture generally, is one the authority of which must extend from the humbler to the higher interests of humanity. It has respect to the soul,—to the religious welfare of

our brethren, and of the world. We are not to allow men to perish for lack of knowledge, any more than for lack of food, shelter, or clothing. *Go preach the gospel to every creature*, was the parting injunction of the Son of God to his disciples. And it is written, *He who winneth souls is wise; they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars of heaven. Wo is me, if I preach not the gospel. Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day. If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one, in the spirit of meekness. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. Ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia, for from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place, your faith to Godward is spread abroad.*

Thus we are taught, by the religion of holy scripture, to abound in generous effort, with a view to the future, no less than for the present welfare of our brethren, and of all men. We learn also, from the New Testament, that pecuniary contributions were frequently made by the first Christians, at the call of the apostles, the chief object of which was the maintenance and diffusion of the faith of Christ.

Public duty, which is thus variously urged upon us by the precepts of Scripture, is enforced, in some

measure, by THE MOST ACKNOWLEDGED RELATIONS OF MANKIND TO EACH OTHER. Men who have failed to attach a due importance to the lessons of inspiration, frequently speak of the human race as a *family*. And should those who have the same blood in their veins cease to be brethren? Should a house be divided against itself? A nation is frequently spoken of as a *body politic*. But if such be its character, surely no one part of it should be the foe of another. The hand may not say to the foot, I have no need of thee; and, still less, should one member study nothing so much, as to draw the life-blood from its kindred member. What man ever thus hated his own flesh? Thus, the manner of speaking, which the most obvious relations of society have rendered familiar to us, carries much of that obligation, in this respect, along with it, which is pressed with so much emphasis in scripture. It is plain, therefore, that the man who lives only to himself, violates one of the most certain laws, arising out of the connexions inseparable from his present being. Hence, that servant who was only chargeable with unprofitableness, was pronounced wicked; and cast, bound hand and foot, into outer darkness.

We may remark also, that the claims of public duty are sanctioned by THE PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH IN EVERY AGE. Where can we look, without discerning a generous activity, as the effect of enlightened piety? There are the labours and sufferings of prophets, apostles, confessors, and

martyrs,—all prosecuted, or endured, in devotedness to a public cause. What a life of invincible perseverance was that of the great apostle to the Gentiles—and simply from the hope that he might *by all means save some!* And whence the patient heroism of reformers, and their adherents, in later times? The voice of the holy prophets will answer, when they are heard saying, *For Zion's sake we will not hold our peace, and for Jerusalem's sake we will give thee no rest, until thou shalt cause the righteousness thereof to go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamb that burneth.* Paul went so far as to affirm, that he could wish himself accursed, after the manner of Christ, if he might thereby save his countrymen; and never counted his life dear unto him, so that he might finish his course with joy, *and the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus.*

And there is THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS HIMSELF on this point. But how shall we speak of this matter? *He was rich, and for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. He was made sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He died the just for the unjust. He gave himself for us, a sacrifice, a sweet smelling savour unto God. So that God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* Here was infinite generosity, benevolence which passeth knowledge. Mark the application which the apostle has given to this stupendous act of sovereign goodness. LET

THE SAME MIND BE IN YOU *which was in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to claim equality with God, but made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Thus the duty of studious effort to advance the interests of our fellow-men, as well as our own, is urged upon us by the most explicit precepts of Revelation, by the most acknowledged deductions of Reason, and by the noblest possible Examples.

II. But it is less difficult to shew the claims of this duty than to define its LIMITS—and this is our second preliminary.

The duty under review, is not so enforced in scripture, as to take the precedence of private obligation. We are to *provide things honest in the sight of all men*, whatever public interest may droop, as the consequence. The professing Christian, who is not prepared to submit to many painful sacrifices, and to the lowest toil, when required, in order that he may make *provision for his own household*, has *denied the faith*, and is worse than an infidel. Thus integrity, and industry, are essential to personal religion; and no supposed zeal in the cause of humanity, or of the gospel, can justify a neglect of the one or the other. We have recently seen also, that it is an importance of this primary character which attaches to our religious obligations

in relation to ourselves, and our families. There are no public claims that may be allowed, generally, to supersede the devotions of the closet, or of the domestic circle.

Thus far there is no difficulty. But it is not easy to fix, in all cases, upon the line which divides between the care due to our own affairs, and that which may be due to the affairs of society. Men will err, in this respect, according to their principles and temperament; the selfish and slothful on the one hand, the generous and active on the other. The latter excess is less frequent, and certainly much more excusable than the former. It is plain, that the extent of public duty, in any given case, must be determined by the means of usefulness which the individual may possess. Our leisure, our capacities, and our property, all are talents; and gloomy are the prospects of that man who, having ten, is content with the employment of one. We have reason to fear, that there are not a few men, calling themselves Christians, who die much too rich to be found Christians at last. No truly devout mind would stand in their souls' stead, for their treasure multiplied a thousand fold. One thing is sure; it has not been their practice, *having food and raiment therewith to be content*; nor is it without alarm that we think of their ascending to the presence of that Judge, who praised the conduct of the widow, in presenting the offering which consisted of her last mite.

But the majority of persons possess little, if anything, of the treasure of this world; and these often censure such as differ from them, in this respect, when failing to make the best use of their substance. It should be considered, however, that time is a property, as certainly as wealth; and that the man who does not make the best use of his time, would probably fail as to making the best use of riches. Influence of character, natural ability, these, whether greater or less, are a kind of property; and the man who does not employ them in the paths of usefulness, is as much an offender as the culprit who shall hoard his wealth until death, instead of making it a blessing to mankind. The life of Martin Luther supplies a beautiful exemplification of these great lessons. His time, and his talents, were readily consecrated to the good of the human race; and though long known as the companion of princes, and the regenerator of Christendom, he chose to leave his own family in comparative poverty, confident that the God to whose cause he had been so long devoted, would not forsake the seed of his servant. It is true, Luther was an extraordinary man. But the parable of the talents is descriptive of the church in general, and it teaches that there is no member included in that body, to whom one talent, at least, is not entrusted; and, what is more, that the man of one talent, will be judged as strictly as his fellow-labourer possessing the greatest number.

It is conceded, then, that the extent of public

duty, in the case of individuals, is a matter which can only be determined by circumstances. But it is, at the same time, evident that there is a measure of such duty, however small, devolving upon each of us, and that the man whose usefulness does not keep pace with his means,—that is, with his greater share of leisure, ability, or wealth, would do well to remember Him, who, in bestowing these talents, has said, concerning each of them—*Occupy till I come.*

III. With reference to the Difficulties to be encountered and overcome, in the discharge of public duty, we may remark, generally, that these all derive their main strength from the SELFISHNESS OF HUMAN NATURE. The term selfishness describes that form of depravity, of which all the outbreaks of injustice, or irreligion, are only so many varied expressions. It is this preference of himself, according to his own narrow and mistaken conceptions of selfish interest, which has taught man to cast off the authority of God, and to make light of the claims of his neighbour. The law of rectitude enjoins a supreme concern for the divine honour, and just that amount of regard as to the well-being of our fellow-men, which we cherish in relation to our own. The law of selfishness is seen in the conduct of the first man, when he not only presumed to partake of the forbidden fruit, but could attempt to save himself by descending to an accusation of his partner ;—*The woman whom thou*

gavest to be with me, she gave me of the fruit and I did eat. Thus the blame was attached to the woman, and even to God, rather than to himself. This degraded state, both of the understanding and the heart, has become inherent in man. It is true, there are some generous, or kind, tendencies remaining; but the pervading element, the power that rules within us, is not of this nature. It is not even just; it is beyond our conception wicked. It disposes us, by ten thousand acts, to put ourselves in the place of our neighbour, and in the place of God. It violates the claims of man, though sanctioned by the Almighty; and it does the same by those of the Most High, though grounded on the infinitude of his nature and benefits. What is the leading passion of the covetous, but selfishness? What, on the other hand, is that of the profligate spendthrift, but selfishness? What is the real object of the ambitious—is it not some aspiring form of selfishness? And what is the pursuit of the multitude, who never rise to the sphere of ambition, but some meaner form of selfishness? Mark the restlessness of the many passions observable in these different classes—their hopes and fears, their joys and griefs. Are not all these as so many emanations, or existences, ever crowding around the matters with which the selfish interest is supposed to be connected? *They have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and are employed in hewing out to THEMSELVES cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold*

no water. We may well say of such self-love, that it is

“ A poor blind merchant, buying joys too dear.”

In this state of things consists the fall of man; and to recover us from this state, by a process honourable to the divine perfections, is the end proposed in the gospel. But does the gospel accomplish this design? Let the answer be the state of the just made perfect; and the transforming power of truth, as seen in multitudes, even in this abode of imperfection. It is true the change completed above, is marked by many defects and blemishes below. There only, is it accomplished; here, it is simply in its progress. There, men reign as kings; all the inordinate selfishness once arrayed against them, and dominant over them, being prostrate, and destroyed. Here, these passions, though partially subdued, have sufficient power to beset us with danger; and to impose upon us the duties of laborious watchfulness and effort. They have lost dominion, but they do not cease to annoy. They are doomed to be extirpated, but it is by being crucified—a manner of dying which is both lingering and painful.

Now the gospel is not only the great, it is the only means by which the overthrow, and the ultimate destruction of this guilty selfishness can be secured. It has been adjusted to this end by infinite wisdom. To this end it is sent into the world; and the more we are brought under its influence,

the more do we escape from this bondage which has come upon us. In the love which it discloses, there is a manifestation of so much that is condescending and disinterested, that the man who receives it becomes imbued with its own generous element; and is constrained, by the new impulse which it creates within him, to look beyond his own things to the things of others. It places before us an example of free, unbought benevolence, greater than it had entered into the human heart to conceive;—a benevolence, moreover, having a special regard to our own welfare. And assuredly it is not too much to expect, that our reception of infinite good, in the place of infinite evil, and this, through the medium of an infinite sacrifice, should call forth something of that nobleness of nature in us, by which we find ourselves to have been so marvellously befriended. *Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.* It is not merely because we have received much, that much is to be expected from us; but because we are also promised much, and because *in due time we shall reap, if we faint not.*

Among the particular forms of selfishness, against which we have to contend in the discharge of public duty, there are four which deserve special notice. The first we mention is COVETOUSNESS. It is a prevalent and dangerous delusion which regards this vice as peculiar to the prosperous and the wealthy. Men may be as covetous in their labour

to get wealth, as in their solicitude to make it more secure, or more productive when obtained. Poverty has its forbidden cravings, as certainly as affluence; the prison, no less than the mansion. We may censure the inordinate desires of the rich, and, while far from suspecting it, may be governed by precisely the same passions. We may hoard our pence, as they hoard their pounds. It may be in their power to do much; our utmost ability may be small. But if they leave their much undone, we may leave our little undone; and, while acting thus, may be negligent of the fact that the man who is unfaithful in little, may be unfaithful in much; that the disposition which hoards one talent, would hoard a greater number if intrusted to it. In vain do we flatter ourselves that we overlook the little we may do, simply because it is little. This happens, rather, because we want the state of mind which is necessary to all usefulness.

The tendency of covetousness is ever to harden the heart; to familiarize the mind with every species of duplicity; and to make its victim the deceiver and the foe of himself, as much as of his fellow-men. It chains a man down to the pursuit of his object, and at the same time chains him away from its enjoyment. It renders him expert in the invention of every kind of excuse as soon as any attempt is made to extract a little of his substance in favour of any public object. At such a moment, he can see abundant reason to suspect

the most estimable of mankind ; or will affect to be astonished at the weakness of what is proposed, though fraught, perhaps, with the maturest wisdom. So subtle are the workings of this passion, that it can deprive a man of the most common notions of consistency, and duty, as occasion serves ; and it can brighten the dullest intellect into shrewdness, the moment its idol is threatened with the slightest degree of spoliation. Thus it can make darkness, and create light ; and is equally to be dreaded on account of the power with which it seizes on the heart, and the treachery with which it veils the understanding. Hence one scripture says, *Take heed and beware of covetousness* ; another calls it *idolatry* ; and it is added that, *when men will be rich they fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown them in perdition.*

But are Christians ever affected by this odious passion ? Would they were not. Among those who have long borne that name there are some whose conduct so nearly resembles what we have just described, as to make their personal religion a matter of very painful questioning. Others, and happily not a few, evince the power of the gospel, in their victory over such degrading thralldoms. That gospel which taught the Christians at Jerusalem to consider none of their possessions as their own, and which prompted to so many generous deeds among the disciples in other cities, has lost nothing of its efficacy. It still leads to religious

and benevolent exertion, in a degree to which the histories of false religion supply no parallel.

The Christian is apprized, that what he calls his own, is only entrusted to him for a while ; and that the chief value of property, as of every other gift, is that he may therewith honour the Being from whom it is received. He knows that his love of the true riches, must controul his love of earthly treasure, or his soul is lost—that to love the things of the world, more than the things of God, is to perish with the world. It is, therefore, his study, his effort, his prayer—his fervent prayer, that in seeking any present good, it may be in the spirit of the stranger and pilgrim; and that in using the gifts bestowed upon him, it may be as not abusing them. Life is the day allotted him to labour, the world and the church are the fields before him, and he could as readily expect to find the intemperate, the unchaste, or the fraudulent, as parts of the church of God in the great day of separation, as a useless rich man. And alarming as the consequence of such a statement may seem, faithfulness requires it to be said, that the man who is habitually more concerned to accumulate or retain the gains of this world, than to see that his soul, or the souls of others, may be saved, is no Christian. He may have a name to live, but he is dead ! He may have contrived to draw a false peace from the gospel, and may have done so through many years ; but he has been its blot, and not its ornament, and the heritage awaiting him is its threatenings, not its promises.

Nothing short of a deep conviction of these sentiments, accompanied by the aids of the Holy Spirit, will ever produce the generous temper of the gospel in a mind tending toward covetousness. They were considerations of this nature which reached the heart of Zaccheus, when he said, *the one half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man, I restore unto him four fold.* And they were reflections of this nature which constrained a late Christian philanthropist to weep, on hearing that a large addition had been made to his already extensive property. An event, which to vulgar minds, would have appeared all joyous, was seen by him chiefly as connected with a solemn increase of responsibility and danger. This was that spirit of wisdom, and of self-diffidence, which becometh the gospel; and which is strictly necessary, to the successful issue of our war against covetousness. While in such a state of mind, men learn what that scripture means—*it is more blessed to give than to receive*, and are disposed to seek good in bestowing it. They are thus raised to a participation in the secret of celestial blessedness. The angels find a source of joy in the repenting sinner. It is written of the Saviour; that *the joy that was set before him* in bringing many sons unto glory taught him to *endure the cross, despising the shame.* And what, said the Apostle, *is our joy, and our crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the day of the Lord Jesus? I have no greater joy*, said another inspired teacher, *than*

to hear that my children walk in the truth. Happy they, the springs of whose chief delight are thus unearthly and divine !

SLOTH is another foe of public duty we have to mention. The love of ease has been frequently described as the besetting sin of human nature. It is certain, that we every day see, and feel, the impediments which it places in the way of usefulness. If our plans may be accomplished with little effort on the part of others, we indulge the hope of success. But if much sacrifice be required, our anticipations generally decline, until they reach the point of despair. It is the same, in a great measure, when looking to ourselves. We dare not confide in our own perseverance, if it should be put to a severe test, any more than in that of our brethren.

How many intellectual men pass life away without any thing deserving the name of labour ! And this, perhaps, is their conduct, while professing to regard their ability to do good, as a matter of which an account must be given hereafter. They read, they talk, they luxuriate — but they shrink from real exertion. They look, probably, to the Redeemer of men, expecting ere long to receive from his hand a place in heaven : but they are idlers in his cause on earth. The same kind of delinquency frequently occurs in the instance of the man of business—the individual whose province is in practical affairs. He might bring his discernment, his experience, and his leisure, to the aid of many an

important object. But it is easier to beguile himself with trifles, than to apply himself to duty. He is more concerned to provide personal amusement, than to benefit either the church or the world. Remind these persons of the guilt they thus contract, and, like the covetous man, they will either find or make a thousand excuses, that they may still *hide their hand in their bosom, and refuse to labour*. The slightest opposition will be, to their pampered nature, as *a hedge of thorns*. They will not plow *by reason of cold*; or they will say *there is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets*.

Now where there is this feeling as to public duty, there is usually a great degree of negligence with regard to more private claims. But slothfulness, whether it has respect to our worldly avocations, to our spiritual improvement, or to the religious welfare of others, is a habit uniformly condemned in the sacred scriptures, and in the strongest terms. Thus it is written, *Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise,—* mark her provision for the future, her restless employment in the season allotted to activity, and her safety as the consequence. Learn thus to consider thy latter end; and to anticipate the different apportionments of those who labour in the vineyard, and of those who stand all the day idle. Poverty is said to come on the slothful husbandman, like an armed foe; and, upon the slothful professor, destruction will come with the same overwhelming force—heedless of his drowsy petitions,

a little sleep, a little slumber; a little folding of the hands to sleep.

Christians, in common with other men, are all more or less exposed to this evil. But they are observant of the manner in which it is overcome by the irreligious. It is perceived, that those who would become wealthy, or powerful, or celebrated, have usually found it necessary to subject their inferior nature to a course of rigorous self-denial. And it is observable, that they sustain themselves, mainly, by keeping the supposed excellence of their object constantly before them; and, with this, the strongest probabilities as to their ultimately obtaining it. They persuade themselves that it is a good of no common order; and that in seeking it, they shall not labour in vain.

And this is just the mode of proceeding, which, under the divine blessing, enables the Christian to obtain an ascendancy over the slumbering selfishness of his nature. As spiritual things are seen by him in their greatness and beauty; and as he can assure himself that, in seeking them, he shall not spend his strength for nought, he becomes animated, so as to strive against the habit of the sloth, and to run in the way of the divine commandments. For what are all the accumulations of present wealth, compared with the riches to be possessed hereafter? What are the most splendid distinctions on earth, compared with the crown of glory that may be worn in heaven? Who can need be told, that the man who has saved an

empire has done little, in comparison with one who has saved a soul from death? It is our activity in this path, and in this alone, that will bear fruit in eternity:—that will be found to have scattered the seeds of greatness and blessedness before us in the Paradise above. If the hope of earthly advancement can so expel our native indolence, how much more effective should be the anticipation of celestial good? If the imperfect, and the perishing, can do so much, what ought not to be expected from the complete, and eternal? Were all the world sinking in despondency, — prostrate in despair, the Christian should even yet be *stedfast, immoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord*. He too, is called to labour for greatness, for riches, and for pleasure, for these to an infinite amount; and this he has to do, constrained by the mandate and the promise of Him who is all-sufficient, and who changeth not.

We have to speak of PRIDE as another foe of public duty. To do good, it is usually necessary that we should stoop, rather than rise; and the proud man is not accustomed to stoop, except it be for the purposes of self-gratulation. The circle of usefulness, generally consists of a number of little things; but pride is ever disposed to pass over little things, in contempt of their littleness. The individual who would be serviceable, on any thing approaching to a large scale, must avail himself of assistance from others; and to this end must possess a power of interesting their favourable

feeling, and of attracting their confidence. But a proud man, in proportion to his pride, must be deficient in this power. He would often rather leave the best service unperformed, than attempt the doing of it in company not exactly to his taste. If you would employ him, it must be for an object suited to his over-weening notions on the subject of his own importance; and it must be with associates regarded as upon his own level. It is this feeling, which frequently determines what a man shall believe, no less than what he shall do. There are persons whose religious creed, whose political creed, and the whole of whose conduct, whether connected with religion or the world, are manifestly the choice of this one absorbing passion—pride. Their reason—their very conscience, is its creature.

The stream in which we find authority, opulence, and fashion, is that in which we generally find the high-minded, the selfish, and the vain. Many of these may possess but little of the distinction pertaining to the class in whose train they affect to follow; but, though filling the humblest place, they evidently deem it good to be there,—flattering themselves probably, that if not personally great, they receive something like a reflection of greatness from the splendour of their party. Men who come to the questions of truth, or duty, in such a state of mind, may be fairly described as forsworn against both:—*Have any of the scribes or pharisees believed on him? We know that God*

spake by Moses, but, as to this fellow, we know not whence he is.

And are such men ever called to be Christians ? They are. But their calling, as must be obvious, is to a warfare indeed. Nor is it difficult, perhaps, to discern, even to the end of their conflict, that this foe of public duty, like some evil genius, is always present with them, to check or destroy the feelings disposing them to what is good and generous. It can insinuate, at every turn, that they are not treated with sufficient respect ; that their condescensions, or their services, are not sufficiently valued ; and that they are, in consequence, released from all obligation to future effort. They are not turned wholly aside, by these, and other treacherous suggestions ; because they are taught to remember, that the humblest offices of kindness, are not too trivial to have been frequently performed by the Son of God ; that his companions, in going about doing good, were the poor fishermen of Galilee ; and that he persevered in the course prescribed to him as the means of human salvation, notwithstanding all the neglects, and the enmities, which he never failed to experience from the hand of man. It is also remembered, that the Saviour, whose life thus proclaimed him meek and lowly in heart, often said, *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted.* Considerations of this nature dispose the believer to the exercise of fervent prayer ; and, rendered impressive by the power of

the Holy Spirit, they prove sufficient to keep the pride of his heart in subjection, to show him the beauty of humility, and to fill him with an anxious concern to possess it.

We have also to notice VANITY, as another manifestation of selfishness, opposed to this department of duty. The proud man is one who thinks very highly of himself; the vain man is chiefly concerned to be so regarded by others. A vain person, accordingly, will labour only while he may be praised; and since to attempt any great good, in an evil world, is assuredly to provoke malignant opposition, the vain-hearted will be as a foundation of sand in regard to any good cause. The law of such natures is found in custom, fashion, the sentiments that happen to be most prevalent. If the vain man should brave censure from one quarter, it will be in the hope of praise from another; and if this hope should fail, then his activities will fail. The great inquiry with him is not, What has Incarnate Benevolence commanded?—but what will *men* think, what will they say? We need not stop to ask what would have followed if this spirit had been submitted to, in the case of the apostles, and the early Christians, or on the part of the reformers, and their martyred disciples. *How can ye believe*, said Jesus, *which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only? Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men.* This last maxim strikes at the root of all vanity. Hence the Christian is

led to implore that he may know the will of God, and that he may act according to it, whether through evil report or good report.

From the whole, it is observable, that the claims of benevolence, which might otherwise have been in no few respects doubtful, and always open to cavilling, are freed from uncertainty, and rendered strictly imperative, by the explicit announcements, and paramount authority of the gospel. Its declarations are those of unerring rectitude, and of infinite greatness. It has extended our obligation with respect to mankind, much beyond the limits which the world has assigned to it; and, at the same time, demonstrates, that our selfishness, the great antagonist of all duteous feeling, is a far more formidable evil than is generally apprehended. But the sacred writers, while they seem, in this view, like men employed in rendering our thralldom hopeless, are merely exposing its complicatedness, and its might, that we may no longer trust in an arm of flesh; but that, while bringing our best vigilance and energy to the struggle, we may cleave to his strength, who has said, *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit*. It is, that with all the consciousness of having this demon influence within us, we may cast ourselves at the feet of omnipotent love, exclaiming, *Lord, save or we perish!*

That we may be the more readily mindful of what is required from us in this particular, we are not only to consider our great pattern, in the grace of

our Lord Jesus Christ, but are called to look upon human nature as possessing a worth which no scheme of man could have attached to it; and upon the acts of benevolence, as leading to results, far exceeding what the utmost conjectures of reason could have imagined. Man, as viewed by the enemies of revelation, is usually little more than a better class of animal;—his death being the natural oblivion of a superior kind of instinct. But this is not his position, as seen in connexion with the gospel. Viewed through that medium, he is seen as immortal and accountable; and as partaking of favour from the Lord, immeasurably beyond what our thought would otherwise have conceived. The conclusion, from this fact, is at once manifest—the nature, on which so much is bestowed, and for which so much is provided by the Creator, must possess no mean claim on our care, our feelings, and our means of befriending it. To strengthen this conclusion, the visions of the last day are presented to us, and that our solicitude in behalf of those for whom Christ died might be strong and unfailing, the Redeemer speaks of himself as saying to the risen host of his affectionate disciples, *Forasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me.* And what is remembered thus, on account of its influence on the proceedings of the judgment, will be remembered, for the same reason, through the ages of eternity.

Where, then, are motives to philanthropy, like those supplied by the gospel? And where, in fact,

is the amount of philanthropy, that will admit of the slightest comparison with that of the church? By the church we mean, not that various multitude who have agreed to corrupt the gospel down to their own level; but the men who have embraced the substance of the Christian doctrine, and borne the fair impress of its sanctity and beneficence. The existence of anything resembling an association for purposes purely benevolent, was unknown in the earth, until called forth by the generous influence of Christianity. These, it has now so multiplied, that they can scarcely be enumerated; and along with them, are the many confederacies of devout men, which contemplate nothing less than a universal diffusion of the truth, and the salvation of the word of God. All these movements indicate, that the obligations of men with regard to each other, are more widely understood, and more adequately felt. And as this state of things is peculiar to regions which the scriptures have enlightened, it reminds us of those surpassing motives, in favour of whatever is just and compassionate, which the scriptures have supplied. Nor is it possible to foresee the extent of those changes, which this principle of voluntary association in the cause of religion and humanity is yet to produce.

CHAP. VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PERSECUTION.

————— A patriot's blood,
Well spent in such a strife, may earn indeed,
And for a time ensure, to his loved land
The sweets of liberty, and equal laws ;
But martyrs struggle for a brighter prize,
And win it with more pain.

COWPER.

TOWARD the close of the epistle to the Hebrews, an appeal is made to the history of the church, as exhibiting the triumphs of faith. The sacred writer begins with Abel. The mind is then conducted through a travel of nearly four thousand years, and becomes associated with patriarchs, and prophets, and devout men, who, during that lengthened interval, had borne testimony to the truth, amid much affliction, and in the face of the utmost danger. Some of these, it is observed, had *trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

The object of the apostle when adverting to these facts, is to urge on the converted Hebrews an imitation of examples so truly noble. With the same view, he calls their attention, in conclusion, to a still more memorable instance of patient suffering, under the same kind of evil. *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* FOR CONSIDER HIM THAT ENDURED SUCH CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, LEST YE BE WEARIED AND FAINT IN YOUR MINDS. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

In this chapter, we have to consider the warfare of the believer as connected with PERSECUTION. In doing this, it will behove us to Explain what we mean, by the term Persecution; and to notice something of the manner in which the spirit so designated still Manifests itself. We shall then be prepared to consider its dangerous Tendencies, with regard to the Christian, and the provisions of the Gospel as Opposed to them.

I. Men sometimes speak of being persecuted when exposed to repeated importunities, of a nature not exactly agreeable to them. But this is a

CHAP. VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PERSECUTION.

————— A patriot's blood,
Well spent in such a strife, may earn indeed,
And for a time ensure, to his loved land
The sweets of liberty, and equal laws ;
But martyrs struggle for a brighter prize,
And win it with more pain.

COWPER.

TOWARD the close of the epistle to the Hebrews, an appeal is made to the history of the church, as exhibiting the triumphs of faith. The sacred writer begins with Abel. The mind is then conducted through a travel of nearly four thousand years, and becomes associated with patriarchs, and prophets, and devout men, who, during that lengthened interval, had borne testimony to the truth, amid much affliction, and in the face of the utmost danger. Some of these, it is observed, had *trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

The object of the apostle when adverting to these facts, is to urge on the converted Hebrews an imitation of examples so truly noble. With the same view, he calls their attention, in conclusion, to a still more memorable instance of patient suffering, under the same kind of evil. *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* FOR CONSIDER HIM THAT ENDURED SUCH CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, LEST YE BE WEARIED AND FAINT IN YOUR MINDS: *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

In this chapter, we have to consider the warfare of the believer as connected with PERSECUTION. In doing this, it will behove us to Explain what we mean, by the term Persecution; and to notice something of the manner in which the spirit so designated still Manifests itself. We shall then be prepared to consider its dangerous Tendencies, with regard to the Christian, and the provisions of the Gospel as Opposed to them.

I. Men sometimes speak of being persecuted when exposed to repeated importunities, of a nature not exactly agreeable to them. But this is a

CHAP. VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PERSECUTION.

————— A patriot's blood,
Well spent in such a strife, may earn indeed,
And for a time ensure, to his loved land
The sweets of liberty, and equal laws ;
But martyrs struggle for a brighter prize,
And win it with more pain.

COWPER.

TOWARD the close of the epistle to the Hebrews, an appeal is made to the history of the church, as exhibiting the triumphs of faith. The sacred writer begins with Abel. The mind is then conducted through a travel of nearly four thousand years, and becomes associated with patriarchs, and prophets, and devout men, who, during that lengthened interval, had borne testimony to the truth, amid much affliction, and in the face of the utmost danger. Some of these, it is observed, had trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. *They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

The object of the apostle when adverting to these facts, is to urge on the converted Hebrews an imitation of examples so truly noble. With the same view, he calls their attention, in conclusion, to a still more memorable instance of patient suffering, under the same kind of evil. *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* FOR CONSIDER HIM THAT ENDURED SUCH CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, LEST YE BE WEARIED AND FAINT IN YOUR MINDS. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

In this chapter, we have to consider the warfare of the believer as connected with PERSECUTION. In doing this, it will behove us to Explain what we mean, by the term Persecution; and to notice something of the manner in which the spirit so designated still Manifests itself. We shall then be prepared to consider its dangerous Tendencies, with regard to the Christian, and the provisions of the Gospel as Opposed to them.

I. Men sometimes speak of being persecuted when exposed to repeated importunities, of a nature not exactly agreeable to them. But this is a

light, and improper use of the term. It denotes an unjust employment of power. It is a substitution of authority, or resentment, in the place of reason and persuasion. It is always understood as including a feeling the opposite of benevolence. The persecutor would accomplish by force, what should only be sought by means of conviction. His appeal is not to the gratitude, or the love of the human heart, so much as to its fears, and its selfishness. He denies to others, the freedom which he claims for himself; and is ever ready to employ the law of the strongest, that those who differ from him may be kept beneath him. It is true, the influence of education, and of circumstances, is frequently such, that men become, in some important respects, voluntary slaves, and may therefore appear to act but consistently, in endeavouring to impose a yoke upon their fellows. This has often been the case with those who have subjected themselves to the bondage of the Romish church. Having resigned their own spiritual freedom, they become the enemies of such freedom wherever it exists. While burning their fellow-creatures, on account of some alleged error in doctrine, they have professed to consider the penalty awarded, as no more than should be attendant on any similar delinquency, if occurring in the case of their nearest connexions, or in themselves.

Such men must, nevertheless, be designated persecutors. Their boasted equity is a wretched subterfuge, though it may not always appear to

them in that light. They are chargeable with a forbidden use of power. They are equally without a right to surrender their own freedom, or to become the foe of it in other men. And, in fact, they do not mean what they say, when they speak of the punishment that would be due to themselves, should they learn to hold prohibited opinions. The simple and obvious truth is, they would have that restraint to be a matter of necessity in the instance of their neighbour, which is a matter of choice in their own :—a somewhat singular mode of evincing consistency!

If required to state, in few words, what should be understood by the term persecution, in matters of religion, we answer, that wherever injury or suffering is inflicted, purely on account of religious opinion, or of any religious practice, not opposed to the acknowledged laws of society, there is persecution. A degree of suffering, indeed, may be inseparable from our subjection to the laws of brotherly reproof. But this is not to be included in the above statement, since we must suppose all such reproof to be the offspring of benevolent feeling; and to be administered in a manner, which should make it conducive to the advantage of the sufferer. The man who would deprive me of my substance, or of my personal liberty, as the punishment of my religious peculiarities, is not more certainly a persecutor, than is the person, who, for the same reason, has endeavoured to lower my reputation, or to inflict an unnecessary wound upon

light, and improper use of the term. It denotes an unjust employment of power. It is a substitution of authority, or resentment, in the place of reason and persuasion. It is always understood as including a feeling the opposite of benevolence. The persecutor would accomplish by force, what should only be sought by means of conviction. His appeal is not to the gratitude, or the love of the human heart, so much as to its fears, and its selfishness. He denies to others, the freedom which he claims for himself; and is ever ready to employ the law of the strongest, that those who differ from him may be kept beneath him. It is true, the influence of education, and of circumstances, is frequently such, that men become, in some important respects, voluntary slaves, and may therefore appear to act but consistently, in endeavouring to impose a yoke upon their fellows. This has often been the case with those who have subjected themselves to the bondage of the Romish church. Having resigned their own spiritual freedom, they become the enemies of such freedom wherever it exists. While burning their fellow-creatures, on account of some alleged error in doctrine, they have professed to consider the penalty awarded, as no more than should be attendant on any similar delinquency, if occurring in the case of their nearest connexions, or in themselves.

Such men must, nevertheless, be designated persecutors. Their boasted equity is a wretched subterfuge, though it may not always appear to

from heaven to destroy them, his compassionate Lord said, *Ye know not what spirit ye are of. My kingdom, he observed at another time, is not of this world; else would my servants fight. Our weapons,* said Paul, *are not carnal, but mighty through God—strong in his power, who can reach the heart, and turn it to himself. I would,* said the same apostle to Agrippa, *that not only thou, but also all who hear me this day, were almost, and altogether, such as I am, except these bonds.* In submitting to those bonds, Paul was a sufferer for conscience sake. The men who imposed them were persecutors:—nor are the terms in which they are denounced as such, so chosen, as to leave their meaning a secret. Amid the multitude around him, there was no one whom Paul would have afflicted with those *bonds and imprisonments*; which he knew were, in every place, awaiting himself.

But it is not enough to look on persecution in the abstract; or to be satisfied, in general terms, that it is opposed to holy scripture, and to natural equity. It is an evil which becomes the more manifestly iniquitous, the more we become observant of its manner of working. It is the ally of bigotry, and of that bad faith, and that crafty malevolence, of which bigotry is the never-failing parent.

II. In adverting, however, to some of the Modes in which this spirit is manifested, it will not be necessary to dwell on those more revolting exhibitions

of it, which, among ourselves, have happily passed away. Our chief concern is with such of its indications as are still familiar to us.

It is often painfully observable in the conduct of religious parties toward each other. Men accustomed to reflect on the present state of human nature, must regard the persecution of the early Christians, on the part of the idolatrous nations, among whom they were scattered, as in no way surprising. Many things concurred to render such conduct almost inevitable, especially as Christianity was felt to be making a formidable inroad upon those multiplied interests which had become interwoven with the prevailing superstitions. But that the professors of the gospel, when ascending to the place of their enemies, should be found to make the same forbidden use of the secular power, was not so easily foreseen. Nevertheless, so it was. A religion, the design of which was simply to convince, to persuade, and to convert the soul, was not only made to avail itself of those instruments of worldly dominion which, having destroyed the body have no more that they can do, but to put its main trust in them. The wrath of ancient paganism, and the wrath of popery, which succeeded, have been in all important respects the same, and the same works have followed them, the only difference being, that the wrongs chargeable on the Christian persecutor, must be regarded as involving the greater guilt, inasmuch as they were perpetrated against the greater light. If I

had not come and spoken to them, said the Redeemer, they had not had sin, but now have they no cloak for their sin.

The most alarming accusation preferred against mankind, does not relate to their heathenism, nor to their enmity against the divine law. It has respect rather to their abuse of the gospel;—to their making that very revelation which should have expelled their depravity, the means of giving to it more shelter, and of rendering it more hopeless, by clothing it in the garb of religion, and decking it with names of sanctity! Devils may be capable of sinning thus, but, that they have so done, does not appear: *I have not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*, said the Redeemer;—the immediate application of this language was to check a spirit of intolerance in a distinguished apostle; and it is worthy of remark, that, of all men, the pretended successors of that same apostle, have been the most unmindful of this humane admonition, so accordant with the spirit of the gospel, and so directly opposed to the zeal of the ecclesiastical oppressor.

But the guilt of persecution is not peculiar to popery. The history of nearly all parties has been more or less disgraced by it; and the spirit which once animated large masses of men, is still frequently observable in the conduct of individuals. It has excluded supposed offenders from all places of civil trust or honour; and, in the madness of its rage, it has not only deprived them of property,

CHAP. VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PERSECUTION.

————— A patriot's blood,
Well spent in such a strife, may earn indeed,
And for a time ensure, to his loved land
The sweets of liberty, and equal laws ;
But martyrs struggle for a brighter prize,
And win it with more pain.

COWPER.

TOWARD the close of the epistle to the Hebrews, an appeal is made to the history of the church, as exhibiting the triumphs of faith. The sacred writer begins with Abel. The mind is then conducted through a travel of nearly four thousand years, and becomes associated with patriarchs, and prophets, and devout men, who, during that lengthened interval, had borne testimony to the truth, amid much affliction, and in the face of the utmost danger. Some of these, it is observed, had *trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

The object of the apostle when adverting to these facts, is to urge on the converted Hebrews an imitation of examples so truly noble. With the same view, he calls their attention, in conclusion, to a still more memorable instance of patient suffering, under the same kind of evil. *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* FOR CONSIDER HIM THAT ENDURED SUCH CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, LEST YE BE WEARIED AND FAINT IN YOUR MINDS. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

In this chapter, we have to consider the warfare of the believer as connected with PERSECUTION. In doing this, it will behove us to Explain what we mean, by the term Persecution; and to notice something of the manner in which the spirit so designated still Manifests itself. We shall then be prepared to consider its dangerous Tendencies, with regard to the Christian, and the provisions of the Gospel as Opposed to them.

I. Men sometimes speak of being persecuted when exposed to repeated importunities, of a nature not exactly agreeable to them. But this is a

light, and improper use of the term. It denotes an unjust employment of power. It is a substitution of authority, or resentment, in the place of reason and persuasion. It is always understood as including a feeling the opposite of benevolence. The persecutor would accomplish by force, what should only be sought by means of conviction. His appeal is not to the gratitude, or the love of the human heart, so much as to its fears, and its selfishness. He denies to others, the freedom which he claims for himself; and is ever ready to employ the law of the strongest, that those who differ from him may be kept beneath him. It is true, the influence of education, and of circumstances, is frequently such, that men become, in some important respects, voluntary slaves, and may therefore appear to act but consistently, in endeavouring to impose a yoke upon their fellows. This has often been the case with those who have subjected themselves to the bondage of the Romish church. Having resigned their own spiritual freedom, they become the enemies of such freedom wherever it exists. While burning their fellow-creatures, on account of some alleged error in doctrine, they have professed to consider the penalty awarded, as no more than should be attendant on any similar delinquency, if occurring in the case of their nearest connexions, or in themselves.

Such men must, nevertheless, be designated persecutors. Their boasted equity is a wretched subterfuge, though it may not always appear to

them in that light. They are chargeable with a forbidden use of power. They are equally without a right to surrender their own freedom, or to become the foe of it in other men. And, in fact, they do not mean what they say, when they speak of the punishment that would be due to themselves, should they learn to hold prohibited opinions. The simple and obvious truth is, they would have that restraint to be a matter of necessity in the instance of their neighbour, which is a matter of choice in their own :—a somewhat singular mode of evincing consistency!

If required to state, in few words, what should be understood by the term persecution, in matters of religion, we answer, that wherever injury or suffering is inflicted, purely on account of religious opinion, or of any religious practice, not opposed to the acknowledged laws of society, there is persecution. A degree of suffering, indeed, may be inseparable from our subjection to the laws of brotherly reproof. But this is not to be included in the above statement, since we must suppose all such reproof to be the offspring of benevolent feeling; and to be administered in a manner, which should make it conducive to the advantage of the sufferer. The man who would deprive me of my substance, or of my personal liberty, as the punishment of my religious peculiarities, is not more certainly a persecutor, than is the person, who, for the same reason, has endeavoured to lower my reputation, or to inflict an unnecessary wound upon

my feelings. There may be instances in which erroneous opinions are so maintained, and unauthorized practices so persisted in, as to require an unsparing exposure of the ignorance, the disingenuousness, or the self-will of their abettors. But even in such cases, the censor who does not lay bare the wound, with an evident solicitude to heal it, will almost certainly fail of benefiting the delinquent parties; and, instead of bringing due honour to the Saviour, will, perhaps, materially injure the better cause which it was his intention to serve. It is written of our blessed Lord that, *When reviled he reviled not again, and that when he suffered, he threatened not*; and, it is added, that in this he has left us an example, that *we should tread in his steps*. But, if the return of evil for evil be prohibited, how much more unlawful must such means be, where no wrong has been sustained? If the law of retaliation be unchristian, what must the law of aggression be? If we are not to revile, even when reviled, nor to indulge in other than benevolent feeling, even when persecuted, how much less may we so do, or so feel, toward the silent—the unoffending?

So explicitly do the scriptures condemn that degrading language, those bitter words, and, above all, that external violence, which men calling themselves Christians have frequently employed, amid the excitement occasioned by their differences. When Peter would have punished the irreligion of certain Samaritans, by invoking fire

from heaven to destroy them, his compassionate Lord said, *Ye know not what spirit ye are of. My kingdom, he observed at another time, is not of this world; else would my servants fight. Our weapons,* said Paul, *are not carnal, but mighty through God—* strong in his power, who can reach the heart, and turn it to himself. *I would,* said the same apostle to Agrippa, *that not only thou, but also all who hear me this day, were almost, and altogether, such as I am, except these bonds.* In submitting to those bonds, Paul was a sufferer for conscience sake. The men who imposed them were persecutors:—nor are the terms in which they are denounced as such, so chosen, as to leave their meaning a secret. Amid the multitude around him, there was no one whom Paul would have afflicted with those *bonds and imprisonments*; which he knew were, in every place, awaiting himself.

But it is not enough to look on persecution in the abstract; or to be satisfied, in general terms, that it is opposed to holy scripture, and to natural equity. It is an evil which becomes the more manifestly iniquitous, the more we become observant of its manner of working. It is the ally of bigotry, and of that bad faith, and that crafty malevolence, of which bigotry is the never-failing parent.

II. In adverting, however, to some of the Modes in which this spirit is manifested, it will not be necessary to dwell on those more revolting exhibitions

by and by he is offended. The word was listened to, in a sense received, and even with joy ; but, it had not taken sufficient root in the conscience and the heart, to withstand the scorching sun of persecution. The same heat of tribulation which ripened the seed in the good ground, burnt up that in stony places. Nor was it long, before the one became known from the other. There is a profound meaning also in the Saviour's language when saying, *by and by he is offended.* That is, when he begins to grow weary, and is become anxious to retrace his steps, he is careful to invent excuses, so as to make his doing so, in some sort, justifiable. In becoming apostate, he would be regarded as sustaining wrong, rather than as inflicting it. Subtle reasonings, idle objections, which had no kind of force while the calm of prosperity continued, acquire a singular lucidness and power, as the evils of adversity thicken around him.

In what land has persecution ever raged without distinguishing thus between the chaff and the wheat ? When liberty, and even life have been at stake, it is hardly surprising, in the present condition of humanity, that many should have proved unequal to the fiery trial. Nor would it be just to conclude, that all, who, under the influence of terror, have professed to recant their opinions, have thereby forfeited every claim to be considered Christians. The zeal of martyrdom, includes a measure of devotedness, which a remnant only, even among true believers, would seem to have

obtained. Peter possessed it not, when he denied his Lord, though he could soon afterwards say, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.* Hence some allowance should be made for the weakness of human nature, when the test as to firmness is of this alarming description.

It is not so easy, however, to become the apologist of those who fall from their stedfastness, though aware that the evils attendant on retaining it would be comparatively trivial. When we mark the insignificance of those inducements which lead not a few to part with an approving conscience, we are painfully reminded of his grovelling nature who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Peter denied his Lord, but it was to save his life; and, accordingly, was hardly an offender when compared with those who virtually do the same thing for the "bubble reputation," or some little matter of worldly gain. If it be inquired,—what is it, virtually to deny the Lord? We say this is done when we refuse a due avowal of our faith in his doctrines, or decline the obedience required by his laws. And the less formidable the cause by which this line of proceeding may have been induced, the greater is its sinfulness. In our case, the power of persecution is sure to be comparatively feeble, and our apostasy in consequence is the more to be dreaded. The losses of human favour, or of present interest, which may be incurred by a conscientious discharge of our religious duties, may be in a considerable degree painful; but, at the worst, we are only in the

situation of those to whom the apostle addressed himself, saying, *Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your mind. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* Yea, these converted Hebrews, though their sufferings are spoken of thus lightly, had seen the hand of the spoiler come upon their goods, as the penalty of their religious profession. But they submitted joyfully, knowing that they had *in heaven a better, and a more enduring substance.*

Nothing short of this regard to the unseen and eternal, can save our feeble nature from fainting, when borne upon long and heavily by the burden of the oppressor. What was the prevailing theme of the prayers offered by the apostles in their own behalf? And what was their end in so earnestly seeking a place in the prayers of the faithful? Was it not that they might be strengthened to meet the sufferings, and the death, which they were constantly anticipating in the cause of their Lord? And it is only a mind of the same order, that can enter fully into the joy which Paul experienced when he said, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day?*

Now it is still true, that *whosoever will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.* The evil in this respect, with which the apostles were so familiar,

is the heritage, more or less, of every consistent believer. What follows, therefore, but that the future and eternal, which formed the only adequate solace of the ambassadors of Christ in their sufferings, should be our resting-place in similar conflicts? *Peter*, said the Redeemer, *Satan hath desired to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat : but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.* Whatsoever, then, be the kind of persecution to which we are exposed, it must be ours to watch and pray; to seek an interest in the prayers of others; and, especially, in those of the great High Priest over the house of God, who interceded so compassionately in behalf of Peter, and who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Time must be compared with eternity, earth with heaven, the praise which cometh from man with that which cometh from God only; and these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Another danger to which we are liable in the time of persecution, results FROM OUR DISPOSITION TO RETAIN THE OPINIONS FOR WHICH WE ARE CALLED TO SUFFER, PURELY ON THAT ACCOUNT; without giving sufficient attention to the means of ascertaining whether they are true or false. It is true, that persecution has generally been directed against the truth. But it does not follow, from this fact, that every persecuted man is a disciple of the truth. Our opinions may be very obnoxious, and may expose us to much suffering, and still not be scriptural

opinions. It is one of the most serious evils connected with persecution, and one of the strongest arguments against it, that it has a direct tendency to beget a persuasion, that the cause which it is employed to support is necessarily a bad one; and that the cause which it is meant to put down is as certainly good. Men pass to this conclusion, from supposing that parties would hardly resort to the aid of scorn, ridicule, or coercion, as the means of upholding matters of opinion, if those matters were of a nature to admit of being vindicated by some more rational process. The effect is, that the mistaken are often wedded to error by the measures adopted to separate them from it. They feel the want of generosity and fairness in the conduct of their opponents; and they satisfy themselves that this is a course which would not have been pursued except from necessity, since it amounts to a virtual abandonment of the points at issue, considered as questions of the understanding.

This reasoning is not without a large share of truth, though there is considerable danger of its being pushed to extremes. Error in feeling, is the natural result of error in opinion; while the truth as it is in Jesus, will generally manifest its superior nature in the nobleness of its influence. Between these things there is all the relation of cause and effect. But there is an essential difference between a devout reception of the truth, and a mere profession of it; and we continually see, that the latter may not only leave the character unimproved, but

may contribute, in some respects, to its deterioration. It were better never to have known the truth, than to hold it in unrighteousness; and the fact that men may profess to be the disciples of christian doctrine, while they practically dishonour it, suggests the probability, that a spirit of persecution may sometimes be found among the things by which this dishonour is occasioned. Hence persecution, though only *in place*, with the partisans of error, may sometimes be permitted, in common with other evils, to lay its discredit on the side of truth. Many of the reformers, some of the early puritans of England, and the covenanters of Scotland, are well-known illustrations of this fact.

It is the more important to bear this consideration in mind, since we are not only in danger of concluding that our creed must be scriptural, because it is persecuted, but of assuming, for the same reason, that we are ourselves Christians. If such be, indeed, our character, then the words of the Saviour, addressed to his inspired followers, are ours: *Happy are ye when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.* But it must never be forgotten, that we may be subject to the full force of such treatment, as the consequence of our christian profession, and still not be Christians. Judas sustained his portion of reproach, and suffering, along with the twelve. Certain pretended disciples, who are described as having cast out devils in the name of the Saviour, endured the scorn and enmity of a generation

which had charged Him with doing the same by Beelzebub the prince of devils. Yet who looks to Judas as a Christian, or to those *workers of iniquity* as Christians? He went to *his own place*; and they have heard the recorded sentence,—*Depart, I never knew you!*

The vanity which teaches us to regard all suffering on account of religious profession, as a suffering for righteousness' sake, would seem to have been a main support of those profane and childish novelties by which the human mind has been so often drawn aside. Men whose speculations have been of the weakest, and sometimes of the most wicked, description, have never failed to compare their sufferings on account of them with those of Christ and his apostles; and, from being burdened with the same evils, they have not hesitated to announce themselves as partaking of the same character. Nor should it be matter of surprise, in a world like ours, that such pretenders are rarely without followers.

In these instances of deception, the subtle agency of our great enemy is observable. Our religion may be every where spoken against, without deriving the least evidence from this fact, either as to its wisdom or folly, its truth or falsehood. We may be treated as the offscouring of all things, and this may be either because we deserve to be so treated, or because the world is not worthy of us, or, in part, from both these causes. There is a vain-gloriousness of temper, a love of excitement

and conflict, which frequently disposes men to court a measure of persecution. We have, unhappily, many professors of this class. Contention is their element. We are not permitted to think of them, except as connected with notoriety, division, and war. By the church militant, it is plain they understand a fighting church. Their estimate of their personal religion appears to rise or fall, in proportion as they indulge in bitter or disparaging expressions toward other persons, or as they find they have elicited such things from opponents. Their own rancour is complacently described as christian zeal, as the indication of a consistency and faithfulness too little known among professors; and the opposition which it excites, is magnified as the persecution that must ever be called forth by the power of godliness. May God soon put an end to the might of this strong delusion!

Be it remembered, then, that to suffer from the arm of the oppressor, is no more an evidence of our Christianity, than to suffer in any other manner; and that, as in the matter of affliction generally, the tendency of persecution, except it be sanctified, will usually be to harden the heart, and thus to mould the character which disposes men to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.

But the danger to which we are still more liable at such times, is that arising FROM OUR DISPOSITION TO RETURN EVIL FOR EVIL, INSTEAD OF OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD. It was the great difficulty, and

at the same time the great importance, of keeping this bias of our nature under restraint, that led the Redeemer to state the law of his kingdom on this point with so much distinctness and emphasis, saying, *Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you,—bless and curse not.* Hard sayings!—who can hear them? Yet these sayings were enforced by example,—even to the letter. *I have shown you many good works of my Father,* said the Son of man, *for which of these do ye stone me? O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!* And the grace of Him, whose words were thus tender and magnanimous, taught the disciple who was called to be the first christian martyr to imbibe the same greatness of nature, and, like himself, to manifest it triumphantly amid the deepest throes of mortality. *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,* was the generous entreaty, uttered by the last breath of the slaughtered Stephen.

That there are instances in which a resistance of oppression is strictly justifiable, is hardly to be disputed; though it is not always easy to ascertain the line which divides, in this respect, between the lawful and the unlawful. But in cases the least doubtful, there is always danger of our allowing the evil temper by which we have been wronged, to produce a reaction of similar passions in our

own bosom. If we possess means adequate to the protection of ourselves, or of our fellow-men, from suffering wrongfully, it is our imperative duty to employ them for that purpose. But as to *vengeance*, the Most High has challenged that to himself;—*I will repay, saith the Lord*. Yet, who needs be reminded that there is a character of injustice strongly attaching to all the acts of persecution, in the view of the persecuted; and that there is a readiness in the human heart to cherish resentment under every species of injustice? And what must ensue from these facts, but a state of deep peril in reference to that patience, and meekness, and candour, and benevolence, which should ever adorn a profession of the gospel? From the habit of resisting, the mind is in danger of suffering much in all its finer sensibilities; and from its frequent exposure to disingenuous and cruel treatment, it is ever liable to become suspicious, reserved, and hard-featured.

It must be remembered also, that in all the forms and stages of persecution, these dangers are attendant on it. The difference can only be one of degree. Our proneness to indulge malevolent passions is not limited to those who would consign our persons to a prison, or doom us to the stake. We are prone to manifest the same forbidden feeling toward such as seek our injury by misrepresentation, scorn, or ridicule. And if our greatest enemies happen to be those of our own household, the danger is, lest our feelings should be deterio-

rated in regard to those who should have the first place in our natural attachments, and of our being betrayed into inconsistencies, where the consequences resulting from them would be in the last degree painful. That oppression may drive a wise man mad, is the saying of the wisest of men : and the evil which can thus unhinge the strongest, may have power enough, even in a very subdued shape, to throw weaker natures into a lamentable state of disorder. By persecution, a test is applied to those dispositions which are peculiarly christian. So long as we merely return gratitude for affection, or kindness in the place of kindness, what do we more than others ? But if, when our enemy hunger, we feed him ; if, when he thirst, we give him drink ; if, when we do well and suffer for it, we take it patiently, this is the morality of the gospel, and this is acceptable with God.

The facts reviewed in this chapter, afford a striking confirmation of the doctrine of scripture with respect to the present state of human nature. Whence this perpetual, this many-shaped opposition to religion ? It would seem to show, beyond all reasonable questioning, that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*. Supposing this to be, indeed, the state of mankind, it was to have been expected that the enmity which has respect to the holiness of the divine nature, should be extended to its impress in the character of devout men ; and that the strength of the resemblance should

only add to the virulence of impiety. In truth, it is the old controversy between the seed of the woman and of the serpent. There have always been men on earth seeking their best solace in the acts of religious worship, in the study of their Maker's word, and in presenting their adorations, their prayers, and their ascriptions of praise at their Maker's feet. And why have these been so commonly the jest, the scorn, and the hatred of the multitude about them? The answer is obvious—they have been a peculiar people, the opposite of the world lying in wickedness, and alarming witnesses as to the existence and claims of a Sovereign, who, for all these things, will bring the offending into judgment.

And let it never be overlooked, that unaided flesh and blood must ever prove unequal to these fiery trials; but that there is inducement enough in holy scripture, if rendered effectual by the Divine Spirit, to fill us with all strength, and to make us more than conquerors. The man who shall be a loser, with respect to ease, or substance, or secular reputation, for the sake of Christ and his gospel, shall have these returned to him manifold, in the peace of his bosom, in this present life; and, in the world to come, shall have life everlasting. Men may frown, and loathe,—but what can this avail where there is faith to see that God, and angels, and the all-surpassing multitudes in heaven, are approving;—where the mind can seize upon the fact, that all the poverty incurred for the sake of the

Redeemer now, must soon give place to an infinite opulence; that all the obloquy braved for him on earth, must soon brighten into the transcendent and never-failing glory of the skies; and that every approach of suffering endured in his cause here, will be found, ere long, to have been connected, in the merciful retributions of his will, with an infinitude of blessedness hereafter. Hence the Saviour, who saw this connexion between the present and the future as we cannot see it, calls upon us to rejoice, and to be exceeding glad, when exposed to all manner of evil for his sake, because great shall be our reward in heaven. That we may escape persecution, therefore, should be less a matter of solicitude with us, than that we may possess the grace necessary to our meeting it in the spirit becoming our vocation—that we may be *faithful unto death, and inherit a crown of life.*

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —RELIGIOUS DECLENSION.

Soul of our souls, and safeguard of the world !
Sustain, Thou only canst, the sick of heart ;
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto Thee and thine !

WORDSWORTH.

IN the system of nature there is a mixture of certainty and uncertainty. The returns of light and darkness, summer and winter, take place with the regularity which seems to confer upon the future all the sureness of the past. But when we cast a seed into the ground, we do not know that it will live : we do not presume to say that the flower, the plant, or the tree, that we intend should spring from it, will really appear. Should there be such an appearance, some unfriendly state of the elements may cause it to droop and die in its spring time : and, even if it should attain to perfection, it may not be without many a dangerous check,—intervals in which it has seemed to be declining toward corruption, rather than advancing toward maturity. It is the same in regard to every object

of worldly pursuit. Men may determine to be rich, or celebrated, or powerful; and it may be all in vain that they have so determined. Or, should it be otherwise, their course may have been one of great inequality, sometimes leading directly toward their object; at others, receding from it, to an extent exceedingly painful and alarming.

And thus it is in the matter of religion. Minds into which the seed of the gospel has been cast, instead of believing to the saving of the soul, too frequently draw back unto perdition: their goodness is like the morning cloud and the early dew, or as the blossoms which yield no fruit. Others, who hold out to the end, do so amid many changes, and frequent apprehensions, having seasons of darkness and drooping to fill them with humiliation, along with the intervals of light and advancement for which they are thankful. The flower may bloom to perfection, but not without having suffered from the wintry wind: the plant may reach its fulness, and become rich in verdure, but much may have happened to stay its progress and menace it with destruction. And if the acorn has done its work, and the oak has reared its stem, and sent its arms abroad, it has not been without the shaking of many a tempest which threatened to uproot it.

There is nothing, therefore, in the apostasy of religious professors, nor in the apparent, or the real checks, which the work of genuine piety may experience, but what is in strict agreement with

the manifest order of nature and of human affairs. It is the Being who has never failed to open the eyelids of the morning at the appointed time, who has promised that, in its season, the darkness shall become light before those who serve him. Whether we have a place with his servants or not, he best knoweth ; and what that course is, which, in the case of individuals, may best lead to so desirable an end, he alone can foresee. On these great questions we may say, that enough is certain to encourage hope; and enough is contingent, to supply the strongest motives to humility, watchfulness, and prayer. The apostle, who could say, *I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day*, is the same who speaks, at another time, of the necessity of holy vigilance, lest, having preached to others, he should himself be cast away. Nor may we forget, that the voice which said, *All that the Father hath given me, SHALL come to me*, is the same which uttered the emphatic admonition,—*What I say unto one, I say unto all*—WATCH.

In this chapter, we have to do with the believer in that unhappy state of mind which is described in scripture by the term “backsliding;” and have to notice some of the leading peculiarities of the christian warfare as connected with it.

I. To a just view of this subject, it will be important to distinguish between backsliding and

two conditions of mind with which it is frequently confounded ; these are apostasy on the one hand, and a merely altered state of religious impression on the other. The apostle John affirms, that those who went out from among the disciples, did so because they were never really of them. They were disciples in name, but had never possessed the character which that name imports. There were certain things which they had learnt from the gospel, and others which it had been deemed expedient to practise in compliance with it : but there was much remaining which they would not learn, and which, in their natural state, they could not approve. They were content with a part only of the truth as it is in Jesus ; nor was it in their disposition, as unrenewed men, to *esteem the commandments of God concerning all things to be right, and to hate every false way*. Custom, a compliant temper, or the alarms of conscience, produced the degree, and the kind, of religious conformity observable in them. But these causes could not lead to genuine repentance—the repentance, we mean, which consists in a change from the love of sin to the love of its opposite.

Thus it was with the young ruler, who went away sorrowing, when required to set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth. Thus it was with Herod, who heard John the Baptist gladly, and did many things ; living, nevertheless, a life of impurity, and dying under the stain of blood-guiltiness. So was it with Balaam, the son of

Bosor. His religion was powerful enough to restrain him from cursing the people whom the Lord had not cursed; but his love of the wages of unrighteousness taught him to parley with the enemy, and, at length, to lure that same people into ruinous iniquity. It will be remembered, that, in seeking their destruction, he was to meet his own.

There is no apostasy from the power of godliness. It is written, *He who hath begun a good work in you will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ.* It is the form of godliness only that is thus deserted. The backslider is a person who has fallen into sin; the apostate is one who continues in it. It will generally be found, that the one secretly deplores a low state of religion, as among the greatest of present evils; while the other would gladly be reconciled to its utter abandonment. The religion of the backslider, defective as it may be, has its seat in the gratitude and ingenuous affections of the soul, disposing the heart to seek the glory of God and a fitness for heaven. The religion of the apostate was, at best, a religion of fear, or of a subtle and complicated selfishness. The backslider still partakes of a fond, a lingering hope of heaven; the apostate is chiefly concerned to escape from the gulph of perdition. Assure the Christian, even in his lowest state, that he has shut himself out from the favour of God in a better world, and he is at once the most wretched of men: assure the apostate of an exemption from the divine threatenings merely, and he will instantly

say, *Soul, take thine ease ; let us eat, drink, and be merry.* Thus, in the one, there are the elements which promise a return, while, in the other, these are wholly wanting. Hence the difference between the tears of Peter and the tears of Judas—the traitor confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood; but he could not have said, *Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee!* Here was the sorrow of the world, which worketh death; and godly sorrow, working repentance not to be repented of.

Still, there are many points of resemblance between the backslider and the apostate; and, when aware of religious declension, we cannot remember too carefully, that the men who have fallen into the perdition awaiting apostasy, have so fallen *by degrees*. The more we have declined, the more must we resemble such persons; and the greater should be our alarm, the more prostrate our humility before God, and the more earnest our entreaties that restoring grace may descend upon us.

But while we distinguish thus, between declining piety and apostasy; it is important to distinguish also, between such a state of mind, and a merely altered complexion of our experience as Christians. We are liable to be much affected by new things; and mainly because of their being new. This is almost inseparable from human nature; particularly in the early period of life, when the mind is especially susceptible of new and vivid impressions.

It is a tendency, accordingly, which must have its influence with regard to religion. The young convert is frequently brought as into a new world—*old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*. The things intended by the apostle, are those addressed to our mind and heart in the gospel; and these possess great power within us, in the incipient stages of our religious feeling, not only from their own natural fitness to this end, but by means of their novelty. Hence, in the kind of influence, which the gospel extends over us at the commencement of a religious life, there is much that should not, in the nature of things, be expected to continue. In addition to which, the young disciple is sometimes allowed to remain in considerable ignorance as to the evils with which the believer has to struggle, both in the world, and from the state of his own heart. This ignorance is only removed by little and little, as he is able to bear it.

It will be seen, therefore, that, in the course of our experience as Christians, there are changes to be anticipated, which may have the appearance of declension without its reality. It is not the proper office of time, or of experience, really to impair our religious feeling; but it is their office to chasten such feelings, to render them more sober, more wise. As we become more acquainted with the difficulties of the christian warfare, the flush of hope has to give place, in a measure, to the wisdom of circumspection. Our religious joys may be less

frequent, or less elevated ; but our humble, dependant, and prayerful application to duty, may be more obvious, and may be such as some painful lessons only could have produced. There may be less feeling, but more principle. Fewer seasons of unusual delight, but more distrust of ourselves ; more candour and tenderness in judging of our brethren ; a deeper conviction in regard to the limited value of earthly acquisitions, and as to the all-sufficiency of the divine favour. That favour we may not enjoy as we could wish to enjoy it, nor as we think we once did ; but we may be more than ever persuaded of its reality, and of its worth ; and may be prepared, not only to do, but, what is much more difficult, to wait, and even to suffer, in the faint hope of obtaining it. In such instances, there is a kind of declension,—there is less ardour, less excitement, less pleasurable feeling. Still, this is not backsliding. What appears to be lost in one way, may be more than gained in another. We naturally wish to be the subjects of pleasing emotion ; but religion does not consist in pleasant movements of the spirit, it may exist in a vigorous state altogether without them. It has its seat in principle, and its main effect in a spirit of obedience, in dependence, resignation, patience, lowliness, gratitude. Before we can be filled with all the fulness of God, we must be emptied of all confidence in ourselves ; and the increase of this spirit of self-renunciation, however painful the steps that lead to it, is a growth in

grace. On this vital point, the young in religion have always much to learn ; and while this learning is in progress, they are often led to conclude that the defects, of which they are becoming more and more aware, are such as did not before exist. Hence an increase of self-knowledge and of self-abasement, and a more simple-minded and trembling adherence to the divine promises, instead of being properly viewed, are frequently lamented as indications of a declining piety.

But while we thus endeavour to guard the anxious and the fearful against mistaken apprehension on this subject, far be it from any one to flatter himself that a state of backsliding, in his own case, is really no other than this varied progress of christian attainment. Declension, as to the enjoyment of religious exercises, may result from the divine sovereignty, and from many causes. But a declension, with regard to the performance of duty, whether public or private, has no appointment from God, and can only have proceeded from an impaired state of religious principle. This, in short, is what the sacred writers mean by backsliding. Wherever there is a falling-away from those duties in which God has promised to meet with us, to bless us, and to make us a blessing, there is the evil intended. And it will be perceived, that by these duties we mean those of private prayer and self-examination, in common with such as are of a more visible description.

The christian warfare, as maintained against this

melancholy change of mind and conduct, consists in the resistance made to it, by those principles and affections which divine grace has implanted, and continues to preserve. These, like a faithful friend, place themselves in the way of the offender at every step of his downward course, pointing out his folly and his baseness, expostulating with him, and entreating him to return. The conflict belonging to the experience of such a man we shall consider under two divisions. First, as connected with the steps of his Declension, and then as connected with those of his Return.

I. We remark, then, that the beginnings of religious declension will generally be evinced, in A GRADUAL WITHDRAWMENT FROM THOSE EXERCISES WHICH ARE MORE IMMEDIATELY SPIRITUAL, IN FAVOUR OF OTHERS WHICH PARTAKE LESS OF THAT CHARACTER. *The law*, said the apostle, *is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin*. Thus the sacred writer speaks of his own natural state, and every movement on the part of a backslider, is so much done in the way of a return to that state. The mind, indeed, has all its native properties alike, in the converted and unconverted. But in the latter, these properties are sensualized—rendered earthly by the nature of their attachments, and the ends to which they are applied. In religion, spirituality is only another term for holiness; and to give existence to this, and to build it up to perfection, is the great object of the gospel.

We read of some as *backsliding in heart*; and this, we may conclude, has generally been the character of those who become backsliders in conduct. Every encroachment made by the returning powers of ungodliness, produces a stronger disposition to avoid those services which relate immediately to God, and which bring the soul near and alone before him. At such times, private prayer is submitted to, rather than enjoyed. Reading is beset with new difficulty, meditation is almost impossible. This want of interest in such employments, soon operates as an excuse for the frequent, or, perhaps, total neglect of them. The man will sometimes persuade himself that the only cause of this negligence is, that he has not found himself capable of attending to such duties in the manner which is necessary to their acceptance. The real cause, however, will be found in the fact, that he has offended the Father of spirits, either by some particular trespass, or by a gradual falling-away from him, and that he has become filled with the distrust, the shame, and the disposition to avoid the searching eye of his Maker, which the remembrance of such conduct must ever produce. A man will not meet the friend he has injured, even in a crowd, without pain; but to meet him alone, is felt to be exceedingly undesirable. In private prayer we meet God alone; and why does the backslider join in the exercises of public worship, while these more solemn approaches to the Almighty are entirely, or, in great part,

neglected? His deceitful heart allows him to suppose that he is not so much an object of exclusive, or near attention, amid the crowd of worshippers, as in the place of retirement. The consciousness of the Divine presence, which private devotion inspires, is not usually experienced, to the same extent, in the sanctuary.

But the offender does not proceed thus far without meeting with various impediments. He has been subject to an almost constant feeling of self-reproach; and has been harassed by a secret conviction, that his various excuses, whatever momentary or partial soothing they may have afforded to his conscience, have been insincere, and such as will not bear review in a dying hour. That he has done evil, in thus forsaking the Lord his God, is a fact which no sophistry can veil; and his chief solace is a vague hope, that the light and joy of former days, may, at some time, and by some means, be restored. But even while indulging this hope, it is manifest that he has been sinking deeper in thralldom, becoming more and more disinclined to spiritual exercises. As he remembers this, his fears augment, reducing his visionary hope to the lowest point. Thus does he taste that bitterness, which must attend the evil of a departure from the living God.

But we have to remark, that though decay in religion betrays itself first in the closet, its effects soon extend to other departments of duty. It gradually shapes the character into Formality,

infusing into it a spirit of Insincerity, and Vain-glory, and not unfrequently leads to a Corruption of christian doctrine.

With respect to FORMALITY, it is unquestionable, that the backslider may continue to approach his Maker in bodily exercise, while his mind is far otherwise employed. Or he may continue the attention of the understanding, to a certain degree, while refusing the homage of the heart. He learns to honour God with his lips, while his affections are far from him. Even in the house of the Being who knoweth all things, and seeth all things, he can think more readily of his farm or his merchandize, than of the All-sufficient, who giveth songs in the night. He can observe others, and overlook himself; he can hear for others, and forget his own soul. *They come unto thee*, said the prophet, *as thy people come, and they sit before thee as thy people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.* And now is the season, when the peace, and the credit, of the ministers of religion are endangered;—when the pulpit is often made to bear the faults of the pew. The deceived heart clings to every kind of deception, and would persuade itself that its dullness, or its want of spirituality, is to be traced to the preacher. There are six long days in which to covet earthliness; and because this curse of the soul is not wholly expelled, as by enchantment, on the seventh, the spiritual physician is denounced

as a functionary of no value. Is this righteous judgment? Will not God avenge the wrongs thus inflicted on his servants?

Or, it may be, that the only wish of the backslider, in this state of formality, is to be amused, or to partake of gratifications connected with a certain exercise of the intellect, with vivid impressions on the imagination, or with the purely dramatic working of the passions. In such instances, the delinquent may be among the admirers, and not among the traducers of the christian minister. So it was of old: *Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but do them not.* This class of persons has never ceased in the church; and it is one of the devices of our great enemy, to prevent the backslider, and formalists in general, from perceiving that an admiration of human talent, as employed in aid of religion, is quite a distinct thing from an approval of the religion so recommended:—that the attention of the understanding may be excited, and sustained to a very high degree, by a discourse on behalf of christian doctrine, or even of christian duty, and the heart be still dead in its trespasses. So that, contradictory as the supposition may seem, men may be loud admirers of gospel sermons, and, themselves, in a state of coldness, or rather enmity, with respect to the gospel.

In all services, however, where the heart-felt dedication of ourselves to God is wanting, there is

formality :—and formality, from whatever mixture of causes it may proceed, is a sure stage in the history of a backslider.

We have spoken of **INSINCERITY**, as an effect of the change now adverted to. If private prayer be relinquished, why should public worship be observed? The answer is, because the hitherto unsubdued conscience, and the judgment of men, both affirm, that this must be to abandon christianity altogether; and something it is deemed important to do, that the good opinion of mankind on this point may be preserved; and, that the displeasure of the power within, which speaks so audibly in behalf of God, may be somewhat allayed. It is written that God will be worshipped in spirit and in truth; but here we see him approached under the low promptings of selfish fear, and from the vain hope of human favour, in the place of that filial gratitude, and affectionate confidence, which are alone suited to his greatness and beneficence. What is done, is done chiefly to be seen of men, a vice especially prominent in the character of those memorable hypocrites—the ancient Pharisees. They placed the forms of religion in the room of its spirit; and this, as it would seem, in the weak anticipation of imposing upon God, as they had imposed upon man. Too much of the evil adverted to is chargeable, even on the most sincere; but in the state of mind now considered, there is a tendency to render it more formidable at every step, until the heart becomes insensible to its

own deceitfulness, and can dissemble habitually, even before God! What it ought to feel, and does not, it will still affect to feel, and this, not only before men, but under the searchings of Omniscience.

VAIN-GLORY has been noticed as another effect of spiritual declension. The strength of this passion will increase, in the exact proportion in which our zeal for the glory of God may have been impaired. The tenor of scriptural injunction on this point is, that, *Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, all should be done to the glory of God, that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.* This is godliness: equally opposed to atheism, and to what our old divines call—self-seeking. According to the extent in which we fall away from the true spirit of our profession, will be our disposition to prefer our own credit, or gratification, to the divine glory. We learn also, at such times, to attach an improper value to the little we may have done, or suffered, on account of religion. Could we trace the fickleness, the boastings, or the ill-temper, of many professors to their source, they would be found to have derived their origin, and their main strength, from a low state of personal piety. Such persons are little with God, and learn, as a consequence, to think much of themselves. They have a very feeble sense of their obligation to Him who died for them, and this allows them to magnify any little sacrifice, or effort, in his cause. The backslider in heart will speak often of his tithe,

and mint, and anise, and cummin. The man who is just raised above poverty, is usually the most jealous of being thought poor. And the Christian is never so little disposed to value reproof, as when most needing it—that is, in the falling state in which we are now viewing him.

But it not unfrequently happens, that the spirit of the backslider is betrayed into a course, apparently the opposite of this—leading not merely to the oversight, but to the grossest CORRUPTION OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. This language expresses not the conviction of his reason, so much as the wish which naturally springs from ungodly inclinations. The depravity which induces men to say there is no God, leads them to wish, when it is less dominant, that he were, in all respects, *such an one as themselves*. In this state, the opposition directed against the nature of the deity, generally considered, is transferred to particular attributes, and the utmost ingenuity is sometimes employed, to avoid recognizing those properties of the Divine nature, which have failed to commend themselves to fallen humanity. The same thing frequently happens in the treatment of the sacred scriptures. It is not always practicable to reject the volume altogether; but whatever there be in it to which our benighted and grovelling nature may take exception, is too often overlooked, or explained away—so much so, that Christianity, instead of effecting any great change within us, is

frequently made to blend with our low estate, becoming dwarfed and earthly like ourselves. Not unlike this, in some instances, is the conduct of the backslider. He is aware that the christian character, as usually insisted on by preachers, and, apparently, by the inspired writers themselves, is not his own. Thus the motive is not wanting which may suggest, whether such a state of religious attainment be really necessary to his religious safety. Now a scheme has been devised which is perilously suited to this state of mind, and is in great part produced by it. It is a scheme which perverts the grace of the gospel; so as to exempt its disciples from all obligation in regard to its laws. It affirms, more or less directly, that the men who pay a due homage to divine grace, are those who never trouble themselves about the divine precepts. It makes the religion of the New Testament to be a system of privilege and enjoyment, but annihilates it as a code of obligation. It recognizes much that should be believed, something that should be anticipated, and a little that should be felt; but nothing that should be done. Its whole policy is, to construct a path to the heavenly state, that may be accessible to those who neither possess, nor, in fact, wish to possess, the dispositions suited to that state. The declining professor may not adopt all the extravagances of this malignant heresy at once; but he is too often induced to seek a soothing of his restlessness by embracing it in part: and if this attempt should

be successful, there is danger of his soon filling a prominent place among those who thus *hold the truth in unrighteousness*.

It is painful to conceive of the disciples of the gospel as becoming ensnared by evils so much at variance, not only with their obligations, but with their past experience. As certainly as the persons thus fallen have been taught of God, there has been no mean opposition made to the growing strength of these base elements of character, by the principles and affections to which they are opposed. The warmth of christian devotion has given place to the coldness of formality; godly sincerity has been supplanted by hollow pretension; and the lowliness and sorrow of the true penitent, have yielded to that pride and lightness of temper, which must nourish the spirit of vain-glory, and often lead to the grossest perversions of revealed truth. But at every move in this progress of decay, a voice has been heard within, saying, *How is the gold become dim! how is the fine gold changed!* This voice has not failed to proclaim the wretchedness of formality, the hideousness of hypocrisy, and the guilt, and coming punishment of those, who can forget the glory due to their Maker, in their thirstings after the gratification of their own vanity or lust. Against this inward monitor, the backslider has been constantly offending. These solemn utterances, in the secret places of his spirit, have been in behalf of better days, of happier feelings, of principles more holy, and of hopes full of

immortality; and, as Felix trembled before Paul, so does the declining Christian tremble, even in his worst state, when subject to the thrilling power of these unearthly counsellings. Even yet the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour; if it be only in the fact that his faults are connected with this deeper feeling of self-condemnation. So long as this continues, there is hope. Unhappily, there is still a lower degradation to which persons of this class may descend. To the guilt of all the evils we have named, that of FLAGRANT TRANSGRESSION is sometimes added. The gospel accomplishes its work of renovation by degrees. Its progress is like the morning light, or as the blade, and the ear, and the full corn in the ear. Hence it frequently happens, that the sin which ruled over us in our irreligious state, is that by which we are easily beset in our religious state; and in the season of spiritual declension, it too often recovers much of its old ascendancy. The history of the church demonstrates that there is no sin too awful to be committed by us; if we once forsake the unquestionable line of duty. Thus David, the sweet singer of Israel,—even he, had upon him the stains of adultery and murder. We all remember the case of Peter. And who has not been deeply afflicted by the instances of folly, fraud, or immorality, by which professors have sometimes destroyed, as in a moment, the reputation of a whole life? Surely this could not have happened; if they had been sufficiently mindful of that

scripture—*Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* It seems inevitable to conclude, that there must have been a great weakening of religious principle, and of spiritual feeling, before such things would have been assented to and done. Nature is opposed to sudden transitions. The winter and the summer, the day and the night, do not come or go at once. And it is by slow degrees that the leaves of the forest put forth their verdure, and then decay. In the kingdom of grace it is the same. When we see men suddenly destroy their character by some unexpected and disgraceful act, we seem obliged to suppose, that the fatal deed has been preceded by much that tended to such a result. The silent working of deterioration must surely have been perceptible to the individual, long before the effect rose thus to the surface, and became visible.

But now it generally is, if not before, that the backslider becomes painfully alive to his guilt and peril, and begins to return. The truth of the kingdom is still in his heart, and it has now to renew its work of penitence, and regeneration. The gold has been almost concealed and lost beneath the grosser material in cohesion with it, but still it is there; and the season has come in which to separate and purify it, and to save the spirit *as by fire.*

II. But whatever be the means employed to induce the backslider to return, it is to be observed

with regard to the christian warfare as connected with it; that it consists, in brief, of A RENEWAL OF THAT STATE INTO WHICH WE ARE BROUGHT WHEN WE FIRST BECOME PENITENTS. It is, however, a renewal of penitent feeling under circumstances which may well produce a deeper humiliation and more pungent sorrow. It not only includes repentance, but repentance rendered more contrite by the fact, that the sins to which it refers have been committed against that light which is derived solely from the experience connected with a reception of the truth. It is sin partaking of the greatest evil, as being committed against the largest manifestation of mercy. Hence David speaks of its power to inflict suffering, as a breaking of the bones. Mark his words:—*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness : according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness ; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence ; and take not thy*

Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

When the Redeemer said, *Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida*, he meant to teach, that in proportion to the evidence with which the truth and mercy of God are commended to us, must be the guilt of our remaining unaffected by them. And, it is obvious, that the sins of the backslider, from their being committed not only against the evidences of truth and mercy from without, but against the confirmation of those evidences in the blessings conferred upon his spirit, must carry this surpassing guilt along with them. He has tasted of the heavenly gift, felt the powers of the world to come, urged the promises in prayer, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God: nevertheless, he has turned again unto folly, as though in contempt of the most sacred obligations, of the most solemn vows!

Surely it is not surprising if the return of such an offender should be the occasion of a conflict more protracted, and painful, than was connected with his first repentance. We may doubt whether the heart of Peter was ever the seat of so deep a sorrow, as in those moments when, in the affecting language of scripture, *he went out and wept bitterly*. Nor does it seem at all questionable, that the heaviest weight of grief ever experienced by David, was that under which he laboured when composing

the fifty-first Psalm. It was when Ephraim prayed, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God*, that he bemoaned himself, smote upon his thigh, was confounded, and drank indeed of the cup of sorrow. Nor was it until then that a voice was heard, saying, *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still*. Nor should we here be unmindful of Manasseh, a transgressor who broke through all the restraints of a religious education, and became a proverb in crime. In the dungeon to which his sins conducted him, *he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers*; and it was not until his signal wickedness had been followed thus, by affliction and penitence somewhat proportioned to it, that *God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication*.

These examples shew, that there is no degree of religious declension to which the mercy of God may not extend; but they, at the same time, shew the truth of that scripture—*If my people walk not in my ways, I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes*. Sometimes this scripture is fulfilled in allowing the delinquent to fall into unexpected transgression; sometimes by exposing him to much worldly trial and adversity, sometimes by a silent impression upon the conscience, which for a season, perhaps a long one, renders it impossible that the mind should yield itself to forbidden pleasure, and, at

the same time, leaves it in a state of estrangement from the pleasures of religion.

But, however produced, whether by a more sudden or a more gradual process, the chief difficulty connected with the backslider's return is to obtain A RENEWED CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE DIVINE FAVOUR. The more a man has injured his friend, the more difficult must he find it to believe that the injured party is still his friend. Oh! what would not the sinner sometimes barter, to be freed from the dark forecastings of this kind which come between him and his Maker?

The main EFFECT of the divine goodness in healing the backslidings of men, is their stronger feeling of dependance on the divine arm for support and happiness; and their walking, as a consequence, with more humility, and gratitude, and devotedness. The deeper, and the more extended, we feel our necessities to be, the more must we look beyond ourselves, and the more must we admire the generous love which, nevertheless, is found to have supplied them all.

There is a word of admonition that should be connected with the topic reviewed in this chapter. LET THE IRRELIGIOUS MAN BEWARE OF DEDUCING CONSEQUENCES FROM THE FAULTS OF PROFESSORS, THAT MAY PROVE RUINOUS TO HIS OWN SOUL. Among men there is no cause so good as not to have its apostates; indeed, the better the cause, the more probable, in this bad world, is the occurrence of

such conduct. With regard to the instances of religious, and sometimes of moral failure, which take place among accredited believers, the sacred writers teach us to expect such things; and they record some painful examples of this nature belonging to different ages of the church. The man, therefore, who shall urge these, as in any way excusing his own impenitence, does wickedly, and, persisting in so doing, will deservedly perish. Do men deem wealth, or power, or pleasure, less real, or of less worth, because some who strive to obtain them grow weary and fail? The thought is absurd: not more so, however, than is the policy of the man who pretends to excuse his own irreligion by appealing to the occasional failures of religious men. The question is not to be determined by examples; since, if the halting of some would justify one conclusion, the perseverance of others must enjoin its opposite. The fact to be borne in mind is, that we must each one of us give an account of *himself* unto God. If, instead of seeking our own salvation, it should be our pleasure to wound religion, by exposing, or perhaps magnifying, the deficiencies of its professors, we need not travel far in search of the materials from which this kind of gratification may be extracted. But we have also to remember, that a day is coming in which the head of the church will bring the offending in this matter—the men who show the refinement of their moral taste by every where turning from the sound to the ~~offal~~—to his bar.

Every man, conscious of the unhappy change which has now been reviewed, will do well to consider THE DANGER WITH WHICH HE IS BESET, AND THE SORROWS BY WHICH HE MUST ERE LONG BE WOUNDED AND OPPRESSED. Every step, in his present course, must be the adding of another, and another bitter ingredient to the cup awaiting him. The impenitent have an awful hereafter, and may, in consequence, go unpunished even to the grave. But it will not be so with the declining Christian : all that he can know of the bitterness of sin must be known in this world ; and as surely as the guilt of a departure from God is upon him, there is a punishment that will be upon him. How is it with us, then, in regard to those spiritual exercises which constitute the test of spiritual prosperity—the worship of God, sincerity of heart, humbleness of mind, and homage to the divine word ? If we shrink from a strict investigation now, the effect can only be to burden the duty with greater difficulties at a future day. Remember how nearly the backslider resembles the apostate ; and let the bare thought of entering into the secret of such men furnish a salutary alarm : for, doubtless, many are the instances in which those who have persuaded themselves that they were only wanderers for a season, have found the end of their course in the second death ! It was to avowed Christians that Jesus said, *I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, unless thou quickly repent* : and again, *If thou shalt not watch,*

I will come on thee as a thief in the night, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come. And it was to men with the same vows upon them that Paul addressed himself when he affirmed, *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; if he sow to the flesh, he shall of the flesh reap corruption.* The insensibility of the backslider is often such as to make any less solemn appeal than this without effect. He must sometimes be made to see that he is not only in danger of much spiritual loss and suffering, but of sinking into perdition; on his slumbers will remain unbroken, and the sins which easily beset him continue undisturbed.

But, in scripture, the word of admonition is rarely without the word of encouragement. That volume does not include more than two passages that may be at all regarded as placing an insuperable difficulty in the way of the backslider's return; and both of these occur in the epistle to the Hebrews. The one speaks of Esau as seeking repentance, even with tears, and seeking it in vain; the other affirms the impossibility of renewing those minds to repentance, which fall away after having tasted of the pleasures and power of religion, in the manner which the passage describes.

With regard to the first of these passages, we may observe, that it is by no means so simple and obvious in its import as to become in itself a rule. It appears to have a greater reference to those external privileges which pertained to Esau, as the first-born of Isaac, than to the question of indi-

vidual piety; and it does not follow, that the soul must necessarily be lost, because certain advantages of this nature, being once forfeited, were declared to be irrevocable. Our depravity may bring shame and poverty upon us; but these, if sanctified, may conduce to our salvation, instead of preventing it. With regard to the other passage, it is manifestly one of those obscure scriptures which should be interpreted by others on the same subject, the meaning of which cannot be mistaken.

Should the backslider continue to infer from the texts now adverted to, that he has probably sinned to an extent that may not be forgiven, what does the DIVINE CONDUCT suggest as to the correctness of this conclusion? Can you persuade yourself that the mercy which pardoned Peter, David, Ephraim, and Manasseh, Saul of Tarsus, and the men of Corinth, and of Jerusalem, will find *their* sins all surpassed in your history? The conduct of God, in these instances, is in strict agreement with the general statements of his word. Nothing could more betoken approaching destruction than the description which Jeremiah has given of the depravity of his countrymen, or than the threatenings denounced against them;—yet observe the words in which the Most High addresses them:—*Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding.* See also what is written in Hosea:—*And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?*

how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I God and not man. And again, O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. The epistles to the churches of Asia contain many intimations of the same encouraging truth. It is accordingly written, *If any man sin*—whether before conversion or afterwards, in a greater extent or a less—*we have an advocate with the Father*, and one whose atonement may avail against all sin.

CHAP. X.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —DESPONDENCY.

— If there be, whose tender frames have drooped
Even to the dust, apparently, through weight
Of anguish unrelieved, and lack of power,
An agonising spirit to transmute,
Infer not hence a hope from those withheld
When wanted most; a confidence impaired
So pitifully, that, having ceased to see
With bodily eyes, they are borne down by love
Of what is lost, and perish through regret.
O, no, full oft the innocent sufferer sees
Too clearly; feels too vividly; and longs
To realise the vision with intense
And over-constant yearning;—there, there lies
The excess, by which the balance is destroyed.

WORDSWORTH.

THE diseases to which the body is liable are numerous; and each of them demands a treatment, in some degree, peculiar to itself. The remedy in one case, would be destruction in another. Even when the same means are required, it is frequently with modifications, regulated, sometimes by the weakness or strength of the sufferer, sometimes by the stages or symptoms of the malady. Not unfrequently several forms of disease meet together, and call for a careful selection and apportionment of remedies, that disorder may not be increased in one shape by an injudicious attempt to subdue it in another. There are seasons, also, when distempers become

epidemic,—appearing in multitudes at the same time, denoting the unusual prevalence of causes conducing to such effects. And often it happens that the most accurate and comprehensive knowledge, the most enlarged experience, and the soundest judgment, prove unavailing. Disease obtains the mastery; and its victims are levelled with the dust.

But it is not sufficiently remembered, that the diseases of the mind are as numerous, as varied by circumstances, and as complicated, as are those of the body. These also have their epidemic seasons—intervals in which folly or vice, under some particular form, is seen to break forth like the plague: and it needs scarcely be added, that the results of such outbreaks are beyond expression more awful than those attendant on the most distressing inroads of natural sickness. There is no fever so painful in its effects, as that which is frequently produced by a dominance of sensual and ungodly propensities; nor is there any grave so terrible as that to which the lost spirit is consigned!

The mind, then, needs a physician, as much as our inferior nature; and to be this physician is the province of the Christian minister. Sin, in its manifold appearances, is the malady he has to detect: to this end he is to employ all his knowledge, his experience, and discernment. And when all is done, he is to exclaim, *Who is sufficient for these things?* The evils against which he has to provide are subject to the ever-changing feelings

and circumstances of those about him; and what man can hope to meet them with all the wisdom, the promptitude, and the energy which they demand? It is true we are now speaking of recoveries, which happily do not depend on the skill of man: still, the aid which is promised from above, has been promised only in connexion with the use of suitable and prescribed means. The success of the word of God is to be *in the thing whereto he has sent it*; to every man his portion in its season. Here, then, is the difficulty—to select the proper means in each particular case, to administer them properly; and to do this with a due feeling of dependance on supernatural aid. It is certain that the men who have thought most profoundly on these matters, and have been longest conversant with them, are ever the least satisfied with their own proficiency, and the most earnest in entreating that the divine forgiveness may be extended to their errors and defects.

We have been led into this train of remark, from considering the peculiar caution required in administering to that state of mind which will claim our attention in the present chapter. Our first object will be to describe the state intended by the term Despondency; we shall then notice some of its probable Causes; and, lastly, the means by which we should endeavour to rise above its influence.

I. We may discern something of what is included

in religious despondency, by considering THE NATURE OF THE OBJECTS ON WHICH THE CHRISTIAN IS REQUIRED TO FIX HIS HOPE, since it is in the absence of hope, or, at best, in the reduced power of it with regard to those objects, that the state of mind intended consists. It is affirmed in scripture, that God delighteth in mercy; that he pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin; and that he is willing to cancel the guilt of the most unrighteous, the most wicked, who cast themselves on the abundance of his compassion. *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow. As I live, saith Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn from his evil ways and live.* It is affirmed also, that the mercy which thus abundantly pardons, has made the same ample provision for the instruction, the renovation, and the peace of the soul; that it is the office of the Holy Spirit to exhibit the truth, in its beauty and importance, to the understanding, and to apply it to the heart, so as there to induce by it repentance, holiness, and everlasting consolation. Thus the Spirit is said to convince of sin, to shew to us the things of Christ, and is especially designated the Sanctifier and the Comforter. *And if ye, being evil, said Jesus, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it?* The scriptures farther assure us, that the lot assigned to believers on earth is invariably

the best that could have been assigned to them, the arrangements of infinite wisdom being so adjusted as to cause all things pertaining to the present state of such persons to work together for their good. Hereafter they are to awake in the likeness of Him who created and redeemed them ; their knowledge, their purity, their blessedness, all being complete, and secured for ever from the possibility of failure or injury. In the meanwhile, they may be led through ways of which they had not heard, and paths which they had not known ; but their leader has said that his strength shall be perfected in their weakness ; that in his time he will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight ; that these things he will do for them, and never leave them nor forsake them.

Such, in substance, are the objects, or the facts, to which our hopes, as the disciples of Jesus Christ, have an immediate reference. We seek mercy to pardon, and grace to help—we would lay hold on eternal life ; and we seek these things, through confidence in those scriptures which assure us that whosoever seeketh findeth. It is not thus, however, with the desponding Christian. He can go through the whole land of the promises, and though so fruitful to others, may find it all barrenness to himself. The guilt he has contracted, the sinfulness of his heart, the many troubles which encircle him, all appear as unmixed unrelieved evils. The darkness about him is a thick darkness, through which scarcely a ray of hope can penetrate.

It is admitted, perhaps, that nothing can appear more obvious than the meaning of those scriptures which speak of the Divine willingness to pardon. These passages, however, convey no more encouragement to the sinking heart of the mourner, than might be expected from them if susceptible of the most adverse interpretation. It is the same with the promises which refer to the gift and the operations of the Divine Spirit, and especially to the means of obtaining consolation under trouble. It is not denied that the texts relating to these particulars seem to be, beyond all controversy, plain. Still the mind does not rest upon them. It falls too readily away on the right hand and on the left, into the regions of doubt, and sometimes of fearful apprehension. It is concluded that there is a sense, assuredly, in which all these sayings of holy writ are true, but their truth, as a matter of experience, is viewed by the drooping spirit as a privilege belonging to others, whose case has not the unhappy peculiarity of its own. In addition to which, the scriptures contain many threatenings, as well as promises; and, in its present state, the mind is disposed to consider the gloomy as its portion, rather than the hopeful.

Yes; and it is not overlooked that, while the Bible gives the tenderest expression to the Divine mercy, it is, beyond all other books, a searcher of the heart, a foe of false pretension, distinguishing, with alarming precision, between the form of godliness and its power. These portions of the divine word

were meant to destroy presumption; but they were so interpreted as to discourage hope. The indications of conversion in the soul are considered as much less prominent and certain than those which bespeak a state of mere formality, a religion the offspring of slavish fear, or the almost-Christian. And as to heaven, the thought of ever being admitted to it, could such a thought be entertained, would be above every thing delightful. But so it happens, that every thing serving to render that world desirable, operates as a new argument against the conclusion—that one so unworthy may ever be raised to it.

The effect of indulging such forebodings is often seen, not only in the general brokenness of the spirits, but in an impaired state of health. Irreligious connexions, observing this course of things, become confirmed in their dislike of piety. They resort, also, to various expedients, in the hope of expelling the gloom which they find it so unpleasant to witness. Their sovereign remedy is a diversion of the mind to other matters, either in a way of business or amusement. The failure of these attempts increases dissatisfaction; and the troubled heart reads in this lessening of domestic kindness and attention, as in other things, the marked displeasure of God.

The sorrow now described is not that of the repentance which is common to all who believe; and still less is it to be confounded with the remorse of the depraved. It is the settled grief of one who

has walked in the light of the divine countenance; but who now mourns the absence of that light, and is fearing, and almost certain, that it will never return! In the view of such a person, all things seem to have received a commission to justify conclusions of this nature. With David he is troubled, and bowed down greatly, he goes mourning all the day long. Thus many days, perhaps, pass away, and months, and sometimes years. The sufferer is a Christian in the esteem of all Christians who know him, and is unable to show, on any ground of scripture, why he should not thus judge of himself. He cannot deny that his gloomy forebodings proceed from his feelings, more than from his reason,—that he is guided by impression, more than by knowledge. To the question why he thinks as he now does, he has scarcely any thing deserving the name of an answer to return. Nearly all he can say is, that thus he feels, that thus he is impressed, and thus he thinks. There is in him a mysterious, and, as it seems, an irresistible inclination to dwell on the things which produce sorrow, and tell of danger.

Somewhat resembling this, was the experience of Jacob, when he said, *Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.* The griefs of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, were less violent, perhaps, than those of Jacob, when he so spoke; but they were of longer duration, and caused her to be described as of a sorrowful spirit.

And what a picture of woe is presented to us in the return of Naomi to Bethlehem—the place which had known her when she was not to be numbered with the poor, the widowed, or the childless! Ruth, her daughter-in-law, accompanied her. *And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi (pleasant), but call me Mara (bitter); for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?* And how much of the state of mind now adverted to is sometimes expressed in the language of Job. *The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit. My soul is weary of my life. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*

David must have known much of this feeling, or we should not have found him inquiring twice in the same psalm, — *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me?* Nor less connected with the subject now under consideration, is the language of Asaph, in the seventy-seventh psalm. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and*

my spirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?

These instances will be enough to show, that what we have described as the occasional experience of believers in our own time, is not peculiar to the age in which we live, nor to the present economy of religion. It is manifest that this gloomy and distressing judgment with regard to the divine dispensations, has been frequently adhered to, by persons who were beyond all question devout men,—the favourites of heaven. Even these, have sometimes entertained hard thoughts of God; and have indulged in such conclusions with regard to themselves, as to have become the victims of a despondency, which they knew not how to justify, nor how to avoid.

II. We have now to consider this evil in connexion with some of its Causes.

By christian experience, we understand an experience of the gospel in its power to enlighten, to renovate, and to ennoble the spirit of man. It is an acquaintance with the truth, not only in itself,

but in what it is capable of doing. It is the addition of experiment to speculation, of practice to theory. In all other matters this is regarded as the path of wisdom. But while experience is made to be nearly every thing in the several departments of science, or social policy, it is just that thing in religion, on which the wise men of this world are ever disposed to expend their contemptuous sarcasms, or a ribald wit. Every thing in this kind of experience they view as the effect of impaired health, of mental imbecility, or of deliberate fraud. But admitting that many of the impressions, described as parts of christian experience, have no better origin, is it to be concluded that all the experience, so designated, is contemptible and delusive?

Let this reasoning, if reasoning it may be called, be, in fairness, applied to other things. There have been experiments in science, and in human affairs, which, from being constructed on a partial or mistaken view of facts, or from not being prosecuted with sufficient ability, have proved failures. But whoever thought of affirming, on the ground of such occurrences, that all certainty in such matters is a mere dream? Should those faults be placed on the science itself, which manifestly belong to the unskilfulness of the operator? An ignorant man may have missed his way; but it scarcely follows from this fact, that an informed man must do the same. Certain base spirits have yielded to temptation; but we need something more than this to

show that men of another spirit would fail to resist it. All we claim with regard to religion, on this point, is, that men will forbear to judge of the many, from the weakness or the wickedness of the few :—that they should cease to put the exceptions in the place of the rule.

Such, however, is a specimen of that ingenuous treatment, which it is a part of our christian experience to endure in the present world. It is in the nature of evil passions to blind the understanding; and, from the manner in which men often reason, in reference to the essential elements of christian piety, it is plain that of all the enmities of the carnal mind, there are none so deadly as those which have an immediate reference to the Gospel and its Author; since, on no other subject do we find the faculty denominated common sense, so miserably disabled and perverted. Christian experience consists in a struggle between knowledge and ignorance, ingenuousness and prejudice, truth and error; and between the passions which are pure and celestial, and those arrayed against them. Accordingly, the scornful man has gained nothing by shewing that the wheat is not without chaff, nor the gold without an adhesion of dross. Such a state of things has existence in the best. Paul felt it deeply when he exclaimed, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* We do not expect completeness in a change which is merely in its progress. We think it should have a beginning, a middle, and an end;

and we deem the slightest portion of discernment enough to distinguish between these. God has created the light, and has seen it to be good; and the moment is at hand in which it will please him that it should be totally separated from the darkness.

Hence, in adverting to the Causes of religious despondency, we at once admit, that there may be instances in which it proceeds, at least in part, from an IMPAIRED STATE OF HEALTH. The influence of the body over the mind, we feel to be intimate and powerful. Weakness of body is sometimes born with us, sometimes induced, and sometimes the effect of old age; and the mind, which is always more or less affected by it, is, at some seasons, so wrought upon, that events, which at another time would hardly have been noticed, are found to create the utmost anxiety and sorrow. The mind fears where no fear is; and grieves where, in a better state of health, such a feeling would have been unknown. Now where there is this yielding to despondency, in reference to the ordinary affairs of life, it surely is not surprising that religion, adapted as it is to exert a much stronger influence over the susceptibilities of the enfeebled spirit, should become a matter associated with serious doubt and apprehension. For what are the interests of time when weighed against those of eternity!

It may be, therefore, that not a few instances of despondency proceed mainly from this source; and where this is not manifestly a leading cause, it may still have a measure of influence. In cases of

the former description, the pastor has less to do than the physician; and the care of the body, is plainly a duty of the first importance in relation to the soul.

We have to observe also, that despondency is often the effect, in a great degree, of SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE. According to the church of Rome, ignorance is the mother of devotion;—according to the scriptures, and experience, it is the parent of superstitious terror, and the nurse of depravity. It allows men to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; to believe that they are doing good, while doing only evil; and to delude themselves with a hope of future life, while going down to the chambers of death. Even conscience, which should only guide to truth, duty, and heaven, may be thus fearfully perverted, through the want of instruction,—doing just the opposite of its proper office. Thus the heathen trusts that he is performing a meritorious act, in presenting the father who begat him, or the fruit of his own body, in oblation to an idol. Ignorance and error, which have wholly darkened the judgment, in the case of such a man, may misguide it in our own. Our convictions, like his, may be sincere, and, like his, may be erroneous. Our fault may not be in doing contrary to our conscience, but in not making an adequate use of the means appointed to enlighten it. Our duty must ever be to act according to the dictates of this inward monitor; but there is a previous duty, no less binding upon us, which is, that we seek

to have this spiritual adviser rightly and fully informed.

The conscience, then, being in a diseased state—that is, in a state not sufficiently instructed; it frequently happens that the spirit is shaken by unnecessary alarms, and filled with sorrows, which more ample knowledge would have prevented. The smallest matters are sometimes magnified into affairs of the utmost moment. No sin is really trivial, though some may be so spoken of in comparison with others; and, in such cases as are now under review, the smallest transgression, or the slightest omission of duty, is sometimes allowed to occupy the mind until it seems to separate the soul from all hope of salvation. The importance attached to dreams, and to imaginary warnings, the utterance of rash vows, and the fear of having committed the sin not to be forgiven,—all these, and more, possessing a power to afflict the soul with the gloom of despondency, have their origin generally in the want of sound scriptural knowledge. The sacred scriptures present a full description of the work of the Holy Spirit; and, in proportion as the Bible is neglected, error, with respect to this all-important matter, will not fail to encroach on the province of truth. What the Holy Spirit really does will not be understood; and, in instances equally numerous, what has not proceeded from him will be imputed to him.

There is one point especially, on which the want of a sufficient acquaintance with scriptural truth is

often found to be the occasion of much anxious foreboding—this point is, *the revealed method of pardon*. The mind which has received the doctrine of justification by faith, possesses a ground of encouragement, and of confidence toward God, which no other doctrine could supply. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*. But where the event of our acceptance is felt to be dependent, either in whole or in part, on our own acquirements and services, there is a way opened to every kind of uncertainty; and to all that agitation, which uncertainty, on so momentous a point, must tend to produce. Every sin, every defect, becomes a failure in the terms of salvation, and necessarily creates the most injurious impression. The only effect of effort and experience, is to ascertain, with a deeper conviction; that, if men say they have no sin, they deceive themselves. The spirituality of the divine law, the holiness of the divine nature, and the manifold corruption of the human heart,—all are seen as they were never before seen. Thus the mistaken enquirer, seems to be falling away from his object, in proportion to his labour with a view to obtain it; and it is in his disposition to regard this fact, as the too probable indication of his approaching perdition.

It is not perceived, that when the salvation of the gospel is said to be without money and without price, the meaning is, that it is to be without our own deservings. It is not understood that pardon

is conferred purely on the ground of worthiness in another; and that acceptance is ours, solely in virtue of a righteousness not our own. Nor is it yet apprehended, that these blessings are not more the unbought bounties of heaven, than is the grace which enlightens the reason, subdues the will, and changes the heart. All are intended, when it is written,—*Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door of life shall be opened unto you.* Wherever there is a sincere concern to be found in the path of life, and an ignorance of these things, the extent of such ignorance must be that of the distance between the individual and the peace of believing. The means by which rest is conveyed to the soul, are not even known; whereas, they must not only be known, but applied, before a state of repose can be obtained. There are things which we must *learn* of Jesus, preparatory to our entrance into his joy; and the substance of these things, is, that we have destroyed ourselves, and that in him only is our help.

Still, every observant Christian must be aware, that despondency not unfrequently occurs where neither disease, nor defective knowledge, can be said to be its cause.

In some instances it appears to be the result of CONTINUED, OR UNUSUAL SUFFERING. The scriptures teach, that though no affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous, yet afterward it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness—and this we all profess to believe. Nevertheless, when deep calleth

unto deep; when troubles come upon us as a host, or in thick succession, the mind of the most devout man will sometimes droop under them, and even refuse to be comforted. The agitations of the heart interfere with the sober exercise of reason; and in a strange desperateness of feeling, the sufferer can hardly suppose that any change will be for the worse. He prays, and seems to pray in vain. He solicits sympathy, and does so to no purpose. While others seek and obtain, it seems to be his lot to spend his strength for nought. Thus his state is viewed as peculiar,—as under the special frown of heaven. Accidents, and death come, as though to bear away his last fragments of comfort, and leave him utterly desolate. His nearest connexions may prove his persecutors rather than his comforters; or the embarrassments of his worldly affairs may serve to augment the weight of evil already laid upon him. The body, frequently subject to the pressure of heavy burdens, learns to stoop; and the mind, thus laden with grief, often falls into the habit of the gloomy and desponding. A glance at the eighty-eighth psalm will be enough to show, that the picture now before us is not, in the slightest degree, overcharged.

Another, and a very frequent cause, of this depression, consists in A PRONENESS TO INDULGENCES, WHICH THE SCRIPTURES PROSCRIBE AS SINFUL. Where there is no disease, and where neither defective knowledge, nor affliction, can be regarded as the occasion of this state of feeling, religious declension

should generally be suspected. The best men are chargeable with sin daily, hourly; sins of ignorance and of infirmity; sins pertaining to the outward conduct, and to the habit of the mind. But these, while they call for daily penitence, should not exclude hope. The Saviour would not have taught his disciples to pray for the forgiveness of their daily trespasses, if he had not foreseen that the most devoted of his followers would trespass daily. Still, where there is a grieving of the Spirit of God, by a course or habit of known sin, it ought not to be matter of wonder that seasons of spiritual darkness follow.

By such a course of sinning, we do not mean what would amount to an open abandonment of a religious profession. In our day, such a profession may be maintained without any material sacrifice; and it is as astonishing, as it is painful, to see how large a share of the maxims and feelings which are directly opposed to scriptural piety may be sometimes retained in connexion with the most formal pretensions to it. We see that persons professing godliness may indulge in pride, vanity, envy, covetousness, sensuality, wrath, hardness of heart, and in vices even more degrading. Often do they seem to be as much under the power of these evils, as they could well have been, if they had never professed to have received the gospel. When we look on the stubborn pride, the childish craving after human favour, the thirst of present things—in a word, on the many-formed selfishness of not a few

accredited believers, can it be wonderful that the Spirit of God is sometimes grieved, so as to withdraw his insulted light and peacefulness? There is no wonder at it; the astonishment rather is, that the bitterest sufferings of such a state are not more widely dispensed.

We need only glance at the conduct of the persons who indulge such passions, to be assured that they know little of self-examination, or of secret prayer. These solemn duties make men wise, cautious, lowly, and strong in the Lord; and, were they properly attended to, would certainly prevent those outbreaks of folly and irreligion, which we often witness. In truth, one is obliged to suspect, that many of this class have only a name to live; so little do they suffer, notwithstanding the foul spots with which the garments of their religious profession are stained. In the experience of some, the temporary withdrawment of religious hope is employed to make them sensible of their folly and guilt. While shaken by the terrors of despair, they learn to exclaim, *Oh that it were with me as in the days that are past, when the candle of the Lord shone full upon me!*

It must be further remarked, that despondency is sometimes experienced, where neither of the causes hitherto mentioned can be said to have produced it. In such cases, we have scarcely any refuge apart from submission to THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. It is no more surprising, that God should appoint a season of darkness to the soul, without making

known the reason of his conduct, than that he should so frequently allow a veil to rest on the cause or purpose of his proceedings, in relation to other trials. We rarely see the end to be accomplished by the sickness, the bereavements, or any of the various troubles, which befall us. We may ask why these things have happened, or to what end they lead; and, as we press these inquiries, we perhaps discover that we are as ignorant on these points, as in the most mysterious cases of despondency. There is a voice, at such times, which seems to say, *Be still, and know that I am God. Shall it be according to thy mind? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter.* The great solicitude of Job, was to ascertain *wherefore* God contended with him. He could not charge himself with any unusual depravity; and was distressed to know the cause of his signal afflictions. Hence his exclamation—*Oh that I knew where I might find him!* It was this which rendered his sorrow so pungent, when he sought God on the right hand, and on the left, and found him not. *In a little wrath, said Jehovah, to his ancient church, have I hid my face from thee.* From this cause proceeded the cry of David—*How long wilt thou hide thy face from me;* and that of a greater than David—*My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?*

Nor is it possible that we should say how far THE INFLUENCE OF SATAN may be allowed to operate in connexion with this department of our conflict as

believers. The history of the patriarch Job permits us to glance at that economy which pervades the regions of spiritual being, and should teach us to expect, that the agency of our unseen Adversary will be especially active when we are suffering; and that with a view, not only to aggravate our distress, but, by every possible means, to urge us onwards towards presumption or despair. The same portion of holy writ teaches another lesson that is not so readily perceived, which is, that our heaviest trials may be the most mysterious,—the most unexplained. These may come at a moment we think not, and may be accompanied by a multitude of circumstances altogether unanticipated, and greatly perplexing; and, nevertheless, it may, ere long, be manifest, even in this world, that bitterness in the bud, was to give place to sweetness in the flower.

III. With regard to the Means by which we should endeavour to counteract the feeling of despondency, it will be obvious that these have been of necessity anticipated, in a great measure, by what has already passed before us. When the causes of an evil are ascertained, the course to be pursued is generally apparent, and comparatively easy.

Let the invalid, then, give special attention to the means of health; and be careful not to lay upon religion, what belongs mainly, or entirely, to a sickly constitution. Let such persons as have

bestowed little attention on the study of the inspired volume remember, that we must *know* the truth; before it can make us free; and that those who know it, are the persons who have sought after it as men seek hidden treasure. Let the afflicted bear in mind, that there is a strong tendency in heavy and continued trouble to induce hopelessness; and that it behoves them to guard against imputing to the direct displeasure of God; what may have proceeded, in a degree at least, from causes not only less alarming, but connected with the tenderest benevolence. If the heart has fallen away from its steadfastness, and its present gloom should seem to be its allotted punishment, let the thought still be cherished, that the same gracious Being who has withdrawn his light, has taught the desponding spirit to lament its departure, and that he commands all such mourners to inquire of him, and to wait on him, that the joys of the past may be restored.

Wait, therefore, upon the Lord, and be of good cheer; and even yet his strength may be vouchsafed to the heart. He has not said,—*seek ye my face*, and said it in vain, or said it to deceive. If, while evil continues, you are sore amazed as to why it has befallen you, or why it has remained so long; still it is incumbent upon you to remember, that the thoughts of the All-wise are not as our thoughts; and that his servants have oftentimes been required to view him as doing right, though they saw not how that which was done could be made

to agree with righteousness. This severe kind of faith is the most difficult of all religious exercises, and, in the sight of God, is of great price. It was just this kind of obedience that was exacted of Abraham; and he became the father of the faithful by learning to hope even against hope.

Above all things, it behoves the desponding professor to avoid seeking relief by any means having the slightest tendency to lessen the evil of sin. But while exercising a holy vigilance on this point, it will equally become him, to look on sin, not only in the light of the divine law, but in connexion with the mercies of the gospel. He is called upon not only to believe what the law saith, as to its turpitude; but, to believe also what the gospel saith concerning the power and the willingness of the Almighty to bury it eternally, as in the depths of the sea. He has faith in holy scripture even now,—though it is a faith referring chiefly to its threatenings. Why not have faith in its promises also? Already he possesses grace enough to receive a part of the truth; why not seek more grace, that he may receive the whole truth? Is there not room to suspect the working of Satan, when men suppose that there is self-abasement in making God a liar; modesty, lowliness of nature, in questioning the plainest, the most reiterated statements of the Most High? We could not, with our utmost ingenuity, say so much of the sinfulness of our state, as is already affirmed of it by Him, whose voice is heard declaring, *I, even I am He, who*

blotteth out your sins as a cloud, and your iniquities as a thick cloud. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all sin*, and he can save to the *uttermost*. In all *sin*, that of the desponding Christian must be included; and the arm which can reach to the uttermost, must be capable of reaching even to him. To all such mourners we commend the example of David—*Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

Christians who have known little of the conflict now described, will nevertheless do well to reflect on these things. What has been the lot of others, may, ere long, be our own. Or were we sure of exemption in this particular, it would still become us to meditate on this view of the christian warfare, that we may be sensible of our obligation to divine mercy; that we may sympathize with the suffering; and be able to speak a word in season. The duty of ministers to preach the gospel is not more distinctly laid down, than that of Christians to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day.

There is also a word of caution that should be addressed to the thoughtless. JUDGE NOT AS TO THE GENERAL INFLUENCE OF RELIGION, FROM THE PARTICULAR CONNEXION IN WHICH WE HAVE NOW BEEN REGARDING IT. This, as we have already said, would be to put the exception in the place of the

to agree with righteousness. This severe kind of faith is the most difficult of all religious exercises, and, in the sight of God, is of great price. It was just this kind of obedience that was exacted of Abraham; and he became the father of the faithful by learning to hope even against hope.

Above all things, it behoves the desponding professor to avoid seeking relief by any means having the slightest tendency to lessen the evil of sin. But while exercising a holy vigilance on this point, it will equally become him, to look on sin, not only in the light of the divine law, but in connexion with the mercies of the gospel. He is called upon not only to believe what the law saith, as to its turpitude; but, to believe also what the gospel saith concerning the power and the willingness of the Almighty to bury it eternally, as in the depths of the sea. He has faith in holy scripture even now,—though it is a faith referring chiefly to its threatenings. Why not have faith in its promises also? Already he possesses grace enough to receive a part of the truth; why not seek more grace, that he may receive the whole truth? Is there not room to suspect the working of Satan, when men suppose that there is self-abasement in making God a liar; modesty, lowliness of nature, in questioning the plainest, the most reiterated statements of the Most High? We could not, with our utmost ingenuity, say so much of the sinfulness of our state, as is already affirmed of it by Him, whose voice is heard declaring, *I, even I am He, who*

blotteth out your sins as a cloud, and your iniquities as a thick cloud. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all sin*, and he can save to the *uttermost*. In all *sin*, that of the desponding Christian must be included; and the arm which can reach to the uttermost, must be capable of reaching even to him. To all such mourners we commend the example of David—*Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

Christians who have known little of the conflict now described, will nevertheless do well to reflect on these things. What has been the lot of others, may, ere long, be our own. Or were we sure of exemption in this particular, it would still become us to meditate on this view of the christian warfare, that we may be sensible of our obligation to divine mercy; that we may sympathize with the suffering; and be able to speak a word in season. The duty of ministers to preach the gospel is not more distinctly laid down, than that of Christians to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day.

There is also a word of caution that should be addressed to the thoughtless. JUDGE NOT AS TO THE GENERAL INFLUENCE OF RELIGION, FROM THE PARTICULAR CONNEXION IN WHICH WE HAVE NOW BEEN REGARDING IT. This, as we have already said, would be to put the exception in the place of the

rule; and, speaking generally, would be to lay upon religion, the faults of its professors. It is still certain, that the ways of piety, when fully and fairly estimated, are ways of pleasantness. Moreover, if religion is to be avoided, from the fear of incurring the gloom of despondency, there is scarcely a pursuit on earth which should not be avoided for the same reason. Whence those instances of insanity, and even of self-destruction, among earthly-minded men, of which we often hear so much? The answer is,—From the insupportable anguish of **WORLDLY DESPONDENCY**. The number who thus sink and perish, would be greatly augmented, did not the sustaining power of religious hope interpose to prevent it in the case of a large portion of the community. There is not a pursuit below, which has not been thus fatal to the present and future life of multitudes of men; nor one, in consequence, which ought not to be proscribed, if religion is to be avoided on the ground that some of its disciples have refused to be comforted.

Wide is the difference between that despondency which hurries the worldling to his remediless overthrow, and that which occasionally shadows the present experience of the Christian. Ere long, the believer shall obtain *beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; his sun shall no more go down, nor his moon withdraw herself, for the Lord shall be his everlasting light, and his God his glory!*

CHAP. XI.

THE CHRISTIAN 'WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —OCCUPATION.

Time's use was doom'd a pleasure, waste a pain;
That man might feel his error if unseen,
And feeling fly to labour for his cure.

— The man who consecrates his hours
By vigorous effort and an honest aim,
At once he draws the sting of life and death.

YOUNG.

A NATURE infinitely wise can hardly be supposed to employ itself in vain. All the works of God, therefore, even the least important among them, must have some connexion with usefulness. They neither exist by themselves, nor for themselves. But the idea of usefulness is inseparable from that of action, or influence,—always suggesting that there is something to be done, and a capableness of doing it. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea, all have their various modes of occupation. It is the same, in a measure, with the humblest productions of the vegetable kingdom: even these are constantly employed in imbibing from the soil, or from the atmosphere,

the means of nourishment and maturity. The waters of the ocean are ever performing their influx and reflux upon the land, and supplying the elements above us with their genial showers. The great globe perpetuates its daily and yearly evolutions; the seasons come and pass away in restless succession; the planets roll in their orbits; and all things in the great system, from the lowest substance, or the minutest plant, upward to the noblest world, all have their changes, their progress, or their course of action assigned to them by their ever-living parent.

This law, so strongly impressed on the material world, and on all that live upon it, is especially binding on rational creatures, whether seen or unseen. The angels are described as shouting for joy, when the universe rose in its completeness before them. Their frequent appearance on earth in the earlier ages of time; their state in heaven, as sometimes disclosed to us in scripture; their many offices in connexion with the first publishing of the gospel to mankind; and their being all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation;—all these are facts shewing, that to be employed, which the divine law requires from the meanest thing, is especially demanded as creatures partake of more, and higher, capabilities of action. In this respect, the law of the insect and of the seraph is the same; the only difference being, that where much is given much is expected. Hence man is addressed throughout the scriptures as a being whose

home and element should be activity. Whatsoever his hand findeth to do, he is to do with all his might.

In reviewing the Christian warfare as connected with Occupation, it may be advisable to offer a few remarks on the general nature of human Employments. We shall next advert to the State of Mind which the gospel requires us to cultivate while thus occupied; and shall then proceed to notice some of the Difficulties that occur in the course of duty which is thus placed before us.

I. With respect to THE GENERAL NATURE OF HUMAN EMPLOYMENTS, it is to be observed, that they have undergone a material change in consequence of the fall. It is true, that while in the garden of Eden, it was imposed, as a part of the duty of man, *to dress it and keep it*. But the chief office of our great progenitor was of a much nobler character: it related to the culture of his spirit in knowledge and devout affection;—in all that might conduce to the growing blessedness of his communion with his Maker. His mind was a garden, the beauty and fragrance of which were more grateful to the King of heaven than those of Paradise. But when sin entered, a blight came on the fair enclosure within and without. The Eden of the soul withered, as did that in which it had delighted: the earth now became fruitful of the thorn and the brier; and man is doomed to extract the means of subsistence from it by the sweat of his brow.

To prepare the implements of husbandry, and to use them when prepared, was, for awhile, the chief occupation of men, and is one still engaging the toil and the skill of a large division of the human race. In such pursuits, the body acquires dexterity and hardihood, becoming inured to the elements in all their changes, and to labour in all its forms. As civilization advances, manufactures increase; the arts which embellish life spring up; and multitudes become busied in matters which exact less bodily effort, but make a larger demand on the mind, on the reason, the imagination, and the finer sensibilities. In this progress of society, wealth is accumulated, and by this means some are, ere long, released from the necessity of exertion. But even in the most artificial state of existence, the great mass of human beings have always found that their choice has been to live a laborious life, or to want and perish. We must remember also, that among the persons whose circumstances free them from the necessity of labour, there are many who, from various causes, are daily confirming the scripture,—*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.* Not a few wholly forego the enjoyment of what they possess, in the hope of making certain unnecessary additions to it. Others continue to be laborious men from an ardent attachment to science, literature, or the arts; some from a feeling of patriotism and benevolence; and a few under the sacred impulse of religious principle.

Our present concern is not with such employ-

ments as are forbidden, but simply with those which are lawful—such as are evidently parts of the fixed arrangements of providence. We have to consider how we may overcome the numerous impediments in the way of doing properly, what is proper to be done; and how we may best provide against the temptations with which the path of an honourable and lawful occupation may be ensnared. By an honourable occupation, we mean just that, however humble it may be, by which a man may make the best provision in regard to his own wants, and those of such as naturally depend on his exertions. A poet, who was no Christian, has said,

Honour and shame from no condition rise,
Act well thy part, there all the honour lies.

What it is thus to act, the sacred scriptures will explain,—it is, in brief, *to do all things to the glory of God*. We cannot be too careful in endeavouring to understand this great principle, and to act upon it.

II. By doing all things to the glory of God is meant, our doing them so as to render honour to the divine perfections. This supposes a knowledge of those perfections, and also of some rule by which due homage may be yielded to them. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the earth also, is said to be filled with his glory. The meaning of this language plainly is, that the things in

heaven and on earth are such, as serve to show forth the excellence of the Being who has created them. Their greatness, their multitude, their order, and the measure of enjoyment bestowed on the sensitive portion of them, all concur to bespeak the power, the wisdom, and the goodness, which have given them existence. But the Almighty is to be honoured by reasonable natures after another manner. The understanding conferred on men has raised them above the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven; and makes it imperative on them to offer the Most High that intelligent and willing service of which natures like their own are alone capable. The visible universe, considered in itself, is a mere machine, magnificent, wonderful, and to the praise of him who made it; but unconscious of the power which has called it forth, and continues to preserve it. It is a splendid temple; but, viewed apart from man, it has neither priest nor worshipper. On human nature it devolves to occupy the noble edifice; and to render it vocal with the sound of adoration, prayer, and praise.

Nor are we left to deduce our knowledge with respect to the nature of the deity, or what may prove acceptable to him, from the nature of his works, or from the character of his external government. Such is the impaired state of our mind, that we are liable to err at every step, when attempting to read what is written on these matters in the Books of Nature and Providence. The

gospel is a revelation of mercy, adapted to this infirmity of the fallen. The scheme of redemption which it makes known to us, not only states the manner in which God should be glorified ; but explains to us the way in which he *may* be thus served, even by the most guilty and enfeebled of mankind. It places our obligations with regard to him on a new and broader basis ; it supplies us with other and more powerful motives to obedience ; and, above all, it brings to our aid the grace which is sufficient for us.

God is glorified wherever his will is accomplished, whether this be in the flight of an insect, or in the achievements of an archangel. But from different natures, or from the same natures in different circumstances, a different homage is expected. The largeness of the capacities, or of the benefits conferred, determines the extent of the return exacted. What he has done in the behalf of men by the gospel is the most costly, the most wonderful, of all his bestowments ; and we truly glorify him, only as we regard his conduct toward us in this light, and study to conform ourselves, in mind and deportment, to his claims as our Redeemer and Sanctifier. To glorify God is to honour him, especially as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to remember that our deliverance from the wrath to come, and our ultimate possession of heaven, are the fruit of sovereign mercy ; and, under the impression of this truth, to regard the will of God as the rule to

which all else should be subordinate. It is to observe the duties which pertain to us, not only with resignation, as consisting of matters that may not be avoided, but with cheerfulness, as being the manifest appointment of infinite wisdom and love. It is not only to attend to the requirements of the gospel; but to do so in that spirit of lowliness and piety which the gospel enjoins. It is to do the things that are just, and of good report; and this not merely, or chiefly, because even worldly men may have recognized their excellence, but rather because they are parts of what the supreme Benevolence has commanded. This is to glorify God, not only in our bodies, but our spirits, which are his. Thus Christians are to abstain from evil, and to do good; and this they are to do, not from the fear of man, nor from the desire of man's applause; but from the fear of God, and the desire of walking in the light of his countenance.

III. We have now to consider some of the Difficulties in the way of this course of duty.

One very obvious occasion of conflict in this path consists in THE FORCE OF HABIT: what men have been accustomed to do, they have a strong proneness to be doing. If the body be inured to any particular kind of action in its daily avocation, such action becomes, more or less, its habit. It is erect or drooping, graceful or awkward, not from nature, but from circumstances and custom. It is the same with the mind: the channel in which its

thoughts and feelings have been most accustomed to flow, is that from which it is most difficult to divert them. Thus the severest pressure of adversity, and even the near approach of death and judgment, have often proved insufficient to restrain the master tendency of the soul. Even at such times, the attention and sympathies of the spirit, were not to be called off from the objects with which they had been so long and so nearly connected. Yes; and it is often seen that, when reason has failed, the thoughts still wander on in the same direction; and the last utterances of life are not about the world on which the departing nature is entering, but about the pursuits from which it is torn away.

It must be recollected, then, that the great majority of Christians are obliged to give a much larger space of time to worldly occupation than to employments of a nature immediately religious. And as the present is thus, from necessity, a more continuous object of attention than the future, there is always danger lest the seen and temporal should take the precedence, in the mental habit, of the unseen and eternal. In the instance of every unconverted man this consequence follows: the covetous forego the true riches, and the ambitious the true honour. The conflict of the Christian, as it regards his occupation, consists in the struggle maintained by him against this current, so observable in present things.

Nor is the danger adverted to peculiar to any

one path of activity, but common to all. Our employment may consist in the lowest description of manual toil, or it may be of the most elevated and intellectual character, and the effect be the same—a manifest estrangement of the mind from every thing heavenly. Some allow the weight of their labours to sink them into the basest ignorance and sensuality ; while others surrender themselves to the gains or the fascinations of their pursuits, so as to put the wealth and applause of this passing world in the place of the inheritance and the splendours of the world which will never fade or fail. The writer of Ecclesiasticus deplores that listlessness and stupor which so generally accompanied the daily toil of the labourer and the mechanic. *How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the goad, that driveth oxen, and is occupied in their labours, and whose talk is about bullocks ? Every carpenter and workmaster, the smith sitting by his anvil, the potter turning the wheel, all their desire is in the work of their craft.* If it be so greatly the effect of such duties to produce this indifference, even as to matters of natural improvement, it must follow that religion is likely to be of all things the most neglected.

The point with which we have especially to do here is, that these causes, which serve to exclude religion altogether, in the case of the worldly, have often a most injurious influence upon it in the history of those who are its sincere disciples. They confirm irreligion in the one instance, and diminish

the spirit of piety in the other : they mar what they cannot prevent ; and weaken what they cannot destroy.

It is true that diligence in our calling, when proceeding from religious motives, is, in itself, a religious duty ; and it is not less certain, that we may be under the influence of religious motives in our daily employments, without having the mind directly engaged in the act of referring to such motives. It is the habit of a good man to shrink from what is wrong, as it is that of a bad man to do the opposite. In the former, the constant operation of religious principle has given existence to a religious habit ; in the latter, the want of such principles has allowed the natural inclinations to assume a similar fixedness and power. Thus the one may do good, and the other may do evil, without any direct reflection on the quality of their actions ; the deference to religious principle in the one case, and the neglect of it in the other, having become so much a habit as to take place continually without observation. This difference, however, in the outward conduct, being the consequence of so momentous a difference in the habit of the mind, must have the greatest importance attached to it ; since it is on the state of the spirit within us that every thing depends with regard to the good or evil of what we do here, and of what we have to expect hereafter.

Nevertheless, when the apostle put these passages together—*Diligent in business, fervent in*

spirit, serving the Lord, it is obvious he did so, from a conviction that the solitudes of a worldly calling too frequently prove adverse to fervour in religious duties. Such, also, must have been the judgment of Him who knew what was in man, when he said, Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek; and your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Indeed, it was the manifest tendency of secular occupation to distract and debase the mind, unless prevented by the truths and impressions of religion, which led not a few of the early Christians into error on the other side. Their zeal to escape from this danger, disposed many of them not only to condemn the profession of arms, but to relinquish the most lawful avocations, and the general intercourse of society. From this well-meant, but injudicious attempt to escape the too frequent effect of secular anxieties, rose the profession of the monk and the hermit—whose system, like many others, the offspring of excitement, consisted of truth pushed so far as to become error. Still, such practices could never have become so prevalent, nor have lasted so long, if the conflict between the cares involved in worldly pursuits and religious feeling had not been felt and deplored very deeply, and very extensively. Hence, in the language of

the church of Rome, to enter a convent, or a monastery, was to forsake the world.

And when we observe the constant recurrence of secular duties, disappointments, and cares, in the instance of the greater number of believers; and the impediments which these seem to be constantly placing in the way of all religious improvement; it can hardly be surprising that the manner of expression we have noticed should have obtained so generally among the nations of ancient Christendom. It was, no doubt, a melancholy delusion to suppose that the men who forsake the social connexions of our present existence, must, as a consequence, be separated from its pollutions. But it is still true, that the man who is exposed to the full stream of this world's corruption, will need special aid that he may not be borne down to perdition by it. Happily for us, it is promised, that as our day is, our strength shall be. We are assured also, that greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world:—the power which revives, and animates, and saves, is stronger than that which labours to enfeeble, to cast down, and destroy. It is the Christian's privilege to believe these things; and, while obliged to toil for the bread that perisheth, it is his solicitude, and his prayer, that his treasure may be in heaven and his heart there.

We must next observe that INDOLENCE is not an unfrequent occasion of difficulty, when endeavouring to meet the ordinary duties of our station in

the spirit required by the gospel. It is evident that Paul regarded it as possible that a most disgraceful inclination to idleness might be sometimes found along with a profession of Christianity. On writing his second epistle to the Thessalonians, he says, *When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now them that are such, we command, and exhort, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

Indolence is ever conducive to vice and misery. To encourage it in others, is to do them wrong to an extent that may not be limited ; and to tolerate it in ourselves, is to encourage the bane of all good, as relating both to time and eternity. It is surprising to observe the fearful havoc which this vice, slumbrous as it seems, can really produce. The hold which it takes of the system is such, that to endure the contempt and loathing of mankind, together with all that is attendant on homelessness, and nakedness, and cold, and hunger, becomes less dreadful to calculate upon, than a steady effort to get this wretched habit subdued. The choice is often between these two kinds of suffering ; and the event too frequently shews, that the pains of industry are deemed so great, that, rather than submit to them, it is considered better to hazard the miseries of infamy, and want, and destruction. And, passing over these extreme cases, how many

are daily falling from no mean credit into poverty, and worse than poverty, from this same cause!

Now, where there is any marked leaning toward this vice, along with a spirit of piety, there is another sphere added to the many which constitute the warfare of the Christian. And indolence, be it remembered, when leading to the neglect of manifest duty, is not only a sin, but one which is sure not to exist alone. If it refer to worldly duty in the first instance, it will not fail to extend itself to religious duty; and it will put the mind in search of a multitude of vain excuses, in the hope of sheltering its delinquencies. Thus a proneness to deceit becomes the never-failing associate of idleness.

As the frauds and wrongs practised on society may be traced, in most instances, to the fact that some men, while they must eat, will not work, so nearly all the corruptions of Christianity are to be ascribed to the circumstance that men, while concerned to obtain the rest of the future world, are bent on seeking it by some easier or more agreeable process than that which the scriptures have prescribed. Hence the substitution of vagrant fancies in the room of laborious self-examination, of airy speculations in the place of practical holiness. It is the great policy of the worldly idler to render a little effort as productive as possible; and it is precisely thus with the spiritual idler. Their system, accordingly, is to put the easiest and cheapest services in the stead of the more difficult

and costly. And every one must perceive that it requires much less effort to censure Christians than to excel them; to condemn the world than to effect its improvement. Indeed, there is scarcely another vanity so seductive as that which tells a man, that by loudly denouncing other persons, he is giving prominence to some conceived superiority in himself. We want something more, as the evidence of unusual sanctity, than a disposition to seem very angry with the real or the imaginary irreligion of our neighbours.

The substance of what we here say is this;—idleness, the pest of the world, is equally, though under other forms, the bane of the church; and that it much behoves the Christian to guard against its creeping and insidious power in all its shapes. It is the chief ally of our natural depravity, the foe of all duty, and especially of those duties which require peculiar watchfulness and exertion.

Nor has the Bible, in condemning indolence, spoken in vain. Religious men, in every age and nation, in proportion to their scriptural piety, have been distinguished by their industry, activity, and commercial enterprise. Separated from the paths of forbidden and intoxicating pleasures, they have sought their main occupation in useful and honourable pursuits, generally bringing to their plans that steadiness of character which, under the blessing of providence, is usually allied to success.

On noticing the difficulties connected with our secular avocations, PRIDE should not be omitted.

We are all disposed to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; and sometimes conceive that a kind of employment much above the level of that in which we happen to be engaged would not be at all beyond the rate of our ability. Men, in the pride of their heart, have attached various degrees of credit to various kinds of occupation, and have agreed to concede a special honour to those who need not occupation of any sort. Thus they have surrounded themselves with all the inducements to envy and strife; and this false standard of reputation; which the world has set up, is every where sanctioned, more or less, by professing Christians. The man whose views and sympathies, on this subject, are those of the gospel, will often be at a loss for words to express the bitterness of his sorrow on account of the little-mindedness and irreligion of many acknowledged believers, as to this matter. How slight a shade of difference, with regard to outward circumstances, is sometimes found enough to break the tie of social connexion between those who profess to be brethren in Christ. It assuredly was not meant that the distinctions which obtain in society should be lost in a profession of Christianity; nor do we say that believers should not be at liberty to choose the persons with whom to form their intimacies and particular friendships: but we may affirm, that where the man who is only a slight grade below us as to worldly position, is evidently shut out from those kindly notices which, but for

that cause, would have been lavished upon him, there is a spirit evinced which is so completely the spirit of caste, and of the world, as to be nothing short of a gross libel on our common faith.

Now the evil here is, that individuals, on finding others judge of them so much by outward condition, and finding them judge so meanly of that particular niche of the social edifice in which it is their own lot to be placed, begin themselves to be dissatisfied with their circumstances; and the weakness of human nature sometimes leads them to plan much, and strive much, in the hope of ascending the step or two which has left them below the poor level of their haughty brethren. Proud Christian!—could you see the wounds which you thus enable the enemy to inflict on many a despised and neglected fellow-worshipper, the vision would, perhaps, be too terrible to be endured. Multitudes, yielding to the mortified feeling thus excited, have determined on courses which have led them into many foolish and hurtful lusts, and hurried them to perdition.

It is worthy of remark also, that all this worldly assumption, and unfeelingness, may exist along with considerable attention to works of charity. The reason of this is, that the opulent, and those who follow in their train, are in little danger of being identified with the poor and the necessitous by becoming conspicuous as their benefactors. They can, therefore, stoop to such, while they shrink, almost instinctively, from the touch of those who

are just below them, lest the calamity should follow of their being regarded as not at all above them.

A mind forming its judgment as to the effect of the gospel, simply from reading the New Testament, could hardly think it possible that Christians should be capable of so much vain earthliness, especially with the example before them, of His poverty who redeemed them, and of their poverty who were the chosen heralds of celestial mercy to the nations. It did not require Christianity, to constrain a distinguished poet to revere an honest man, as the noblest object in the visible universe. Unhappily, this high-born sentiment is evidently one, which many, with all their Christianity, have yet to understand.

If it be not so, why are the little adventitious circumstances of life allowed to take the precedence of moral and religious worth? Is it not giving to the former, just that value which should attach only to the latter, and thus inverting the order of things which reason and religion concur to enforce? There may be a kind of deference due to wealth, and talent, and office: still, such rules of homage should all be subordinate, in the christian mind, to that which will be all-prominent in the decisions of the last day, and in the rewards of eternity. But how few now think thus, or feel thus!

The Christian, then, often finds, that both the church and the world are, on this point, helpers of the enemy more than of his faith. Happy is he, if

he can say in the midst, it may be, of very humble duties, *I have learned herewith to be content.* May the Lord when he cometh so find us—diligent, and cheerful, in our proper vocation. While the Christian is so employed, however slighted of men, the spirit of glory and of God must rest upon him; and when separated from the petty feelings of this vain earth, it shall be to have his place for ever among the thrones and dominions of a world transcending every thing which the proud or the mighty have ever conceived. Therefore it is, that he is not overcome of evil, but learns, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, to endure contumely, if incurred by his efforts to provide things honestly in the sight of men. Pride would have taught Moses to remain the son of Pharaoh's daughter; duty made him the keeper of Jethro's flock, and the companion of the enslaved and the outcast. And this is not a solitary example.

Nearly connected with pride, as a source of conflict in connexion with the general duties of life, is AMBITION. By ambition we mean, a seeking of our own honour, without a due regard to the claims of God. To this state of mind men are particularly liable, when the objects of their preference are of a nature to call forth the strong or the permanent admiration of mankind. Why is the scholar seen trimming his lamp anew, though the midnight hour has come? Why does the soldier expose himself to every kind of hardship, and brave the peril of all encounters and of all climates? To

what end does the man of science labour on with his unceasing calculations and experiments? And why does the artist fashion his clay with so much care, or pass so much anxious time in creating, and touching, and re-touching the forms upon his canvass? The leading solicitude with nearly all these parties is to become great. It is true that, in the severest toil of such men there is a pleasure; and their lowest state of exhaustion, is often associated with intense gratification, which such minds only can understand. Still, the great secret of all this, is the anticipation of excellence, applause, immortality.

Now the christian warfare, in the case of such persons, consists greatly in an effort to bring these feelings under the chastening influence of religious faith, and devout affection. Its object is to secure to moral excellence, a precedence of natural excellence, and to religious excellence the precedence of all. It would make the authority of God, a matter of greater deference than the judgment of man; and a consciousness of having pleased God, a more delightful possession than the favour of the whole universe would be. It is not to be without solicitude as to our present reputation, but it is to be chiefly anxious that this good, like every other bestowed upon us, may be consecrated in the most effective manner to the source of all good. In such minds, there is nothing of tameness, and it is only a vigorous Christianity that can be expected to bring their strong aspirings under this control.

What the gospel can do in this way, we see, in the instance of the great apostle to the Gentiles, and in many of later times.

It should not be overlooked, however, that a desire to excel may be very ardent, where the means of doing so are of the humblest description; and that ambition may be just as violent in some small minds with regard to little things, as in others with regard to great things. In the former case, disappointment is almost inevitable, and is likely to produce injuries deeply affecting the character and prospects of its victim. In the latter, men are in danger of seeking some petty distinction, in a spirit as vicious as that in which loftier natures pursue the most splendid objects. The great majority of ambitious men are evidently disappointed men; and the impression which disappointment creates, not only tends to impair their usefulness, but to make them the instruments of much positive evil.

We must remember, also, that COVETOUSNESS is a very prevalent evil connected with worldly occupation, and often produced by it. Men who are always pursuing the same object, are in danger of attaching an undue importance to that object. To be ever planning and toiling, with a view to get money, is, in many cases, to become inordinately fond of money. Hence, it generally happens, that the persons longest accustomed to such pursuits, are those in whom this passion is most observable. Moreover, as men become excessively anxious about

the end they have in view, there is danger of their not continuing altogether scrupulous in respect of the means which may be resorted to, in order to its accomplishment.

Gehazi first coveted a reward, and then invented falsehood to obtain it; and Judas thirsting after gain, was lured by it into a betrayal of the innocent blood. One man is said to make light of the gospel message, because he has bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it; another, because he has bought five yoke of oxen, and must needs go and prove them. So sordid is the general effect of the cares which have respect to the bread that perisheth.

The christian warfare, in the case of those who are obliged to be familiar with such cares, consists greatly in an effort to counteract this evil bias, by endeavouring to imbue the mind with the principles and hopes which relate to a better world. And there are not wanting delightful instances of the power of Divine grace in this respect. For if the sordid selfishness of some avowed Christians be a disgrace to all religion, it is delightful to know that the stream of christian philanthropy, and the free-will offerings in support of religion, so considerable in these kingdoms, proceed mostly from that class of persons who are generally occupied amid the snares of worldly business. The great rule to be observed in all such employments, as they have respect to men, is, — *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so unto them.* And there

is another passage relating to them, as they have respect to God, which is no less explicit—*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Be it well considered, then, that the necessity laid upon men generally, to be in some way occupied, is an appointment of God, and one in which he requires them to honour him. Be it recollected also, that the impediments in the path thus placed before us, are such as arise mainly from the force of habit, from indolence, pride, ambition, and covetousness. These are all special foes to that fervour of spirit in the service of God, by which our daily activities should be pervaded and sanctified. They are, therefore, to be guarded against, with the utmost caution. Earnestly must we implore the grace which can alone enable us to preserve a strict integrity, and a frame of devout feeling, amid so much temptation, solicitude, and disappointment.

See especially that your manner of thinking and feeling as to what is really great or little, honourable or degrading, be formed from the pure teachings of the gospel, and not from that low and perverted standard, by which the earthly-minded professor is content to be governed. All that is needed to sustain you in this department of duty, as in every other, is, that your faith in the glory to be revealed should be distinct, comprehensive, and vigorous. This will lead you to the contemplation

of realities, in comparison with which, all that is esteemed great on earth is as nothing—and realities, moreover, for the enjoyment of which, the discipline supplied by your present care and labour, is meant to be preparatory.

What a new character is given to the scene of your efforts, the moment these are viewed as intended to try and mature those principles and affections, which raise the soul into a state of meetness for the exalted occupation of the skies! In the view of the Almighty, there is an intimate connexion between the daily routine of believers on earth, and the pursuits which will engage them for ever in heaven. Your present circumstances are all adjusted, so as to determine whether you will trust in God, be cheerful in the duties he assigns you, honest in the midst of temptation, mainly concerned about the heavenly treasure while obliged to labour for the earthly; whether you will learn humility from chastisement, sympathy from suffering, firmness from endurance,—in short, to see whether you will grow in that habit of mind, which constitutes the only wealth that men take with them when they die, the only treasure that will be rescued from the conflagration of the last day. Thus the mind is the building, and the world and its multiplied affairs are the mere scaffolding, which, under God, are to serve in raising the spiritual edifice to its appointed altitude and completeness. When the noise of every earthly movement shall long have passed away,

these moral effects shall only become more visible ; and the humblest effort in relation to them, will perhaps be found to have shed a truly ennobling influence over many an immortal destiny. Judge not, therefore, of your present doings from day to day, by what they may be in themselves, but rather by the impression they may make on your spirit in regard to God, and thus on its state through an endless duration. All the incidents and resolutions of time, are, in this manner, full of results to be developed in eternity ; and though salvation be not on account of any works of righteousness that we have done, there is an intimate moral connexion between every passing hour of the present, and the wonderful disclosures reserved to the future. Let us not be weary, therefore, *in well doing, knowing that in due time we shall reap, if we faint not* ; the meanest ascending, ere long, to a place with those who hold the office of kings and priests, in the palaces and temples of the world above us.

CHAP. XII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —RETIREMENT.

Human life
Is but a loan to be repaid with use,
When He shall call his debtors to account,
From whom are all our blessings.

COWPER.

CHRISTIANS frequently lose much themselves, and fail in the ability that might render them serviceable to their brethren, by supposing that what is addressed to persons in the peculiarities of whose character or circumstances they do not happen to participate, can be in no way conducive to their own improvement or happiness. What is said with a view to the guidance or encouragement of the afflicted, will, perhaps, be listened to by many who have no immediate affliction to deplore. But all such persons have had their seasons of suffering; and are moreover aware, that such seasons may soon return. Men, also, who are beyond doubt sincere believers, may attend with interest to what is urged on the unconverted: they remember, it

may be, when such appeals were made to themselves, and find it profitable to hear the things which first constrained them to forsake the paths of the destroyer, brought again to their remembrance. But when the character or condition of the parties thus approached is not our own, nor considered at all likely to become such, how prone are we to neglect the subject altogether. What, it may be secretly asked, have the habitually cheerful to do in regard to matters selected with a special reference to the gloomy and desponding? What have the poor to do with counsels designed mainly for the rich; or the rich with such as apply peculiarly to the poor? Why should the educated be troubled about the precise habit of thinking and feeling in the case of the ignorant and the vulgar? or, why should this latter class be urged to reflect on the peculiar conflicts of duty and religion in the case of the intelligent and aspiring?

We answer, that all these classes should think much of the character and situation of each other; and for many reasons. Unless this be done, they will fail to perceive their mutual obligations; and their judgment of each other will, of necessity, be greatly deficient both as to truth and charity. Whence the want of sympathy, and, too frequently, the want of duty, observable among them?—principally from the want of an effort to understand and feel the difference of the circumstances in which they are respectively placed. The cheerful and the desponding, the rich and the poor, the

untaught and the instructed, do not sufficiently endeavour to place themselves in circumstances the opposite of their own. Hence more is expected than wisdom would have promised; and disappointment and wrath follow. On the other hand, less is done by these expectants than ought to have been done, and the good name of Christianity suffers.

As we have intimated, it is from the same cause that Christians so often fail in the ability and the disposition to speak a word in season; they have not sufficiently studied the case of their brethren; and among the evil effects of this negligence is a readiness to indulge in *grievous words which stir up strife*, instead of choosing *the soft answer which turneth away wrath*.

Reason must tell us, that next in importance to the thoughtfulness which has respect to the character of God, is that which is directed toward human nature, considered in the varieties of its present state. Men have prosecuted the most laborious investigations with a view to ascertain the laws of the material universe; and they have done well. But the laws of the mind bring us into nearer connexion with the Infinite Mind. What is the interest felt in the varieties which mark the surface or the productions of the earth, compared with that which should be felt in looking on the different races of mankind, subject to all the influences which have so long served to spread an almost endless diversity over them? To

the Christian, this employment should be especially inviting, since to study the character of believers in all the varieties of their capacity, their culture, and their external circumstances, is to see, on a broad scale, the manner in which the glorious gospel of the blessed God is performing its office. It is to see with what readiness and efficiency it can adjust itself to human nature in every stage of its acquirement or intelligence, and in every condition of life, until, through the infinite condescension and long-suffering from which it has descended to us, it purifies unto itself *a peculiar people—a people meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*. Intelligent men, without the motives of religion, have often affirmed that there is much to be learnt, even by the wisest, from the humblest, or the most degraded individuals of the human family: and certainly there is not a Christian from whose religious history some useful lessons might not be deduced, if we could only so far conquer our pride as to believe thus much, and to act accordingly.

These observations have been suggested by the nature of the subject now to be considered. It is one which is not directly applicable to the many; and yet one to which the many, for the reasons named, and some others, should give their best consideration.

We use the word Retirement here, in a sense which must be explained and remembered. It is employed to denote just the opposite of the state we have contemplated in the preceding chapter;

and as referring, therefore, to that class of persons whose circumstances relieve them from the necessity of pursuing any worldly calling, and who are, moreover, disposed to avail themselves of this advantage by avoiding such pursuits. With regard to all such parties, we have to observe that they are subject to peculiar obligations, and exposed to peculiar dangers.

I. TIME IS A TALENT; and the man who has most of it at command must have the largest account to render. Where the means of grace are equal, the offender who continues longest in a state of impenitence incurs the most awful responsibility. And as the successive intervals of time add thus to the guilt of those who still harden their hearts, so the more those intervals may have been at the disposal of such persons, the more inexcusable will they be found. Jehovah said of one, *I gave her space to repent, and she repented not. The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* Hence the solemn appeal in the second chapter of the epistle to the Romans:—*Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance? But after thy hardness, and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* The last step in this perilous course is described by Solomon,—

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Now time, which carries this accountableness along with it in the case of the unconverted, lays the same responsibility on the Christian. If he possess more leisure, then should he possess more knowledge, more devotion, and be more useful.

It may be justly expected from the unoccupied, that they should give much attention to the means by which PERSONAL RELIGION may be promoted. The means which chiefly conduce to this end are private prayer, the reading of the word of God, the study of its great message to mankind; and the application of that message to the soul, as the means of renovation, hope, and blessedness. We have seen, in a former chapter, that these are duties which may not be innocently neglected in the case of the most occupied; and they must, in consequence, devolve with peculiar weight on those who are exempt from the pressure and distraction of other claims. The professor of this class, who is not a punctual observer of the various exercises which belong to private devotion, must be regarded as wholly a stranger to Christianity, or as a Christian in such a state of declension as should lead to instant humiliation and alarm. For to what can such negligence, in the case of such a man, be attributed, except to the signal power of remaining depravity? There are men who, in ordinary affairs, possess better means of improvement than others,

and, at the same time, fail to excel them; and we know the conclusions that are generally formed from such occurrences. Contempt is the award of such men. Nor is religion an exception to this rule. *What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it*, said Jehovah; *wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?*

What we say of personal religion, will apply also to FAMILY RELIGION. As a parent, the Christian is required to train up his children *in the way in which they should go*; and, as a master, to *bless his household*, by his example, his counsels, and his prayers. Now a much occupied professor will surely fail as to these obligations, unless he be a man of some system and firmness. If the common affairs of a house have not the marks of regularity upon them, you may in general conclude that its piety has not. Correctness and order, where they are habitual, extend themselves, more or less, to every thing. From the want of such a habit, domestic duties are often superseded by others of a more general nature; and the effect is too often seen in the undisciplined and irreligious character both of the children and dependants of some really devout men. But if such neglects are not to be justified, even in the case of the most occupied, what must the guilt of them be when they occur where there has been ample time that might have been so appropriated? Surely, to such a professor, and concerning those whose souls are in a measure

entrusted to him, God would seem to say, *They shall perish in their sins, but their blood will I require at thy hand.*

We observe, further, that the obligation to seek the PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH, which devolves on every believer, must fall with peculiar force on those who have time at their bidding. The men to whom Jesus will assign the kingdom of heaven in the last day, are described as persons who were accustomed to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, and to visit the sick and imprisoned of his flock. And what is more, the manner in which the Redeemer speaks, indicates that such practices are common to all his true disciples, even to those who in the sweat of their face have to eat bread. What shall be said, then, of the Christianity of that man who, with property and leisure, is careless of such employment, or content with doing no more than the straitened or the occupied are doing? Mark the words of the apostle on this subject,—*As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith.* Here believers are made to have the first claim on our sympathy; and our benevolence toward them, and toward all men, is to keep pace with the means, or the time, that may be placed at our disposal. To the church, however, we owe something more than the duties of humanity. In spiritual things, as in other things, we are to be, according to our opportunities, the benefactors of each other; *exhorting each other daily*, and being

helpers of each other's joy. Our reasoning on the previous particulars is clearly applicable to this point:—the man who may do most in the cause of Zion, is the man bound to do most.

We must add, that the rule which thus applies to the church applies equally to the WORLD. Where the greatest command of time is, the largest portion of it should be given to promote the general, and particularly the religious, improvement of mankind. A man of leisure has no excuse for being ignorant of his duty; and as little for not being much employed in it. All the spaces of time granted to us, are granted with that solemn injunction—*Occupy till I come.* Hence the woe denounced on those who *are at ease in Zion.* If to grow old in sin, be to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath; to grow old in barrenness as to these fruits, is to render it fearfully probable that we have only *a name to live*; especially if our means of abounding in such fruit have been much greater than are commonly possessed.

II. We have now to shew that the persons subject to these peculiar Obligations are exposed to peculiar Danger.

They are so exposed, from their disposition TO FORGET, THAT THERE IS ANY SUCH PECULIARITY IN THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AS WE HAVE NOW SHEWN TO EXIST. It is admitted, that the various duties of religion and humanity, which have been noticed, are assuredly binding on all Christians; but it is not

so readily granted that they are binding on men according to their means. Or if it be admitted that such as have most property, or most ability in some other respects, should be most useful, the same consequence is not always supposed to attend on those who differ from their brethren chiefly as having greater leisure. We infer this from the fact, that not a few accredited believers, who, from their opportunities, should not only be the best informed, but the most devout and the most useful, are really the least so. Did their consciences sufficiently assure them that they ought thus to excel others, they would not be satisfied with being merely on the ordinary level, still less with falling visibly below it.

It may be, that the persons so circumstanced have been engaged in secular affairs during a series of years, and have laboured much in the hope of being able to provide, at some distant period, against the necessity of labour. Having succeeded in this object, they seem to conclude that they are entitled to enjoy the rest for which they have toiled. Others have been accustomed from their youth to have the command of time; and the apportionment of large spaces of it to amusement or indulgence has been so habitual, as to take place without any consciousness of impropriety. In some instances of this sort, the great business of life, to use the impious language of the delinquent, is—to kill time.

But we have not now to do with the latter class:

our concern is with Christians;—with such of these as are free from the necessity of exertion in regard to their present condition, and who are often tempted to suppose that they are thereby freed from the necessity of exertion in any way. To judge thus, is to overlook the momentous distinction between a moral exemption, and an exemption arising out of mere circumstances. But we must inquire of such persons,—if time has been at your command from your youth, or, if your industry has been so far successful as to place the years of advanced life at your disposal, from whom have these allotments proceeded? Surely, from the gracious Being who speaks to you in the gospel. He made the circumstances of your unconscious infancy what they were; and it is his hand which has provided every thing included in your cup of life to the present hour. In these things, we every day see that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong—that *the whole dividing thereof is from the Lord.*

Shall we say, then, of the time which is manifestly given to us, that it is our own; and that, as we choose, it shall be wasted or improved? The mind shrinks from the folly and impiety of such language. But does not this impious weakness attach to the conduct of every indolent professor—to every man having this important talent at his bidding, and heedless of the injunctions of scripture as to the proper use of it? If your heavenly Benefactor has given you much time from your youth

upwards, it has been that your personal religion, and your Christian usefulness, might be the more observable. Or, if he has permitted you to separate yourself from the cares and labours of the world in a more advanced stage of life, it is that your last days may be your best—best in your own case, and best in behalf of those whom your influence may befriend. If not inured to hardships in search of the bread that perisheth, it is that you may labour for that which endureth to eternal life. God has evidently put great honour upon you, in granting you so much opportunity of serving him; and he expects to be honoured accordingly. He has released you from those burdens which are a part of the consequences of the fall; and he has done this that you may labour with more freedom and effect in those services which are connected with your salvation—your greatness in eternity. You are made to differ from the bulk of mankind, not that you may sink below them by yielding to the habits of the sensualist and the sloth, but that you may rise above them by giving a more constant and devout attention to those things which are valued by dying men, and which go with them to the mansions of the just. You are severed from much of the bondage of earth, that your spirit may be more like heaven, and that you may strive to render the world you live in more like it.

We read of one whose lands brought forth plentifully, and the only effect was his memorable address to his soul, saying, *Thou hast much goods*

laid up for many years ; take thine ease. But what said the voice of his Maker ? It was the utterance of a fearful doom,—*Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?* So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. It does not appear that this man designed to make an evil use of his substance : all that we may conclude is, that his plans did not embrace the glory of God, nor any immediate reference to the good of his fellow-creatures, but simply such a course of self-indulgence as is usually considered harmless ; and, in the case of such men, every way natural. This was precisely the character of the rich man in the parable of Lazarus. In that record concerning him there is no sin laid to his charge : we are thus left to regard him as having his place with those to whom it will be said, *Forasmuch as ye did it not unto these, ye did it not unto me.* And it will be recollected that mention is made of one who was accounted *wicked*, and cast into outer darkness, not because he had abused the single talent entrusted to him, but strictly because he had not used it.

Thus it is manifestly the rule of scripture, that Christians should not only abstain from evil, but do good, and this according to their opportunities and their means.

We observe, in the next place, that, in the circumstances now considered, there is much that may serve to beget A PROUD INDEPENDENCE OF

HUMAN OPINION, the effect of which is not a little injurious. It must be admitted, that much of the courtesy of human life has its origin in mere selfishness ; and is, at best, deeply tinctured with that vice. Men have always much depending on the good feeling of their fellow-men, and will, in consequence, do much to obtain it. In a crowded population, where individuals are less known, and have less to apprehend or expect from the persons with whom they are immediately connected, we generally meet with the most unrestrained selfishness, a more open contempt of principle, and more striking instances of brutality. Surrounded by multitudes, the man who fails in one connexion may gain another. But in small communities, a stain once contracted is everywhere known, and hardly to be obliterated. Thus there is a feebler check upon evil inclination in the one case than in the other ; and the evil passions must ever be less turbulent, as the consequence of their being less frequently indulged.

Now, the unoccupied man is generally a man of property, and is everywhere sufficiently apprised of the independence which this circumstance confers upon him, as it respects his fellow-men ; and the more he feels this independence, the more is he in danger of neglecting unwelcome duties, however much they may be urged upon him. Thus it is in the case of the worldly man ; and thus it often is with men who call themselves Christians. They are not to be advised ; and as

they conceive that the censures of men cannot substantially affect them, they are perhaps little moved by them. Such persons frequently mark out their own course; and, in a sort of care-nought temper, leave the world and the church to applaud or condemn, as may be most to their humour. It is obvious, that this is a spirit far removed from that of the gospel. The book which forbids our putting the authority of men in the place of the authority of God, commands that we carefully observe whatsoever things are of good report; and requires us to cultivate a spirit of meekness and humility, ingenuousness of temper, and a willingness to learn.

Nor must we omit to observe, that the mind which can think thus lightly concerning the judgment of Christians, as to the things which become a profession of the gospel, will rarely stop at that point. We may venture to say, in reference to the great questions of human duty, that the man who will not hear the church,—by which we mean the body of the faithful,—will hardly be obedient even to the Head of the church. The passions which dispose to a rejection of *their* word, will lead to a corruption of *his* word. They will be described as teaching error, and he will be described as teaching something very different from what his words seem to convey, and from what he has really taught. The transition from the contempt of devout men to an unsanctified, and, at length, a grossly dishonest, treatment of holy

scripture, is easy and obvious; and the circumstances, whatever they are, which may serve to foster this impious state of mind, cannot surely be guarded against with too great caution.

Better were it to have a place with the most helpless of beings, than that our supposed independence of men should lead to a forgetfulness of our entire dependence upon God. In the gospel, the love of God, and the love of the brethren, are declared inseparable. Paul could respect even the weaknesses of believers—*If eating meat cause my brother to offend, I will not eat meat while the world stands.* Far removed from the temper we have now described, is that enjoined in his fervent exhortation to the Philippians—*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* And no less opposite is the course which he prescribes when writing to the Corinthians. *In all things approving ourselves; by much patience, by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things.*

Some of the parties found in the quiet of retirement were once engaged in the hurry and exertion of a worldly calling, and these often fail to make a right use of their leisure, from the difficulty of directing their activities into a new channel. Men, as we have before remarked, are greatly the creatures of custom. What they have often done they acquire an ease in doing, while they feel themselves incompetent to what is new and untried, though, in itself, much less difficult. The man of business may be a Christian, and have been little accustomed to books, or to the habit of reflection which they generally favour; and he may have been no less a stranger to effort, in reference to religious or charitable objects. Hence, though retirement affords him ample time for reading, it may be his disposition that a very little of it shall suffice. He might now meditate on what he reads, but he has never given much continued thought to such subjects, and the ability to do so is felt to be a difficult attainment. He might be active now, as heretofore, the enterprises of religion and benevolence everywhere inviting his aid. But even activity, because of a kind different from that with which he has been familiar, loses its attraction. All his labours have been with the prospect of gain as the result; and though numbered with the disciples of Him who, for our sakes, became poor, he does not quite understand being seriously or extensively occupied without some such end in view.

Hence it too frequently happens, that, after the larger portion of life has been spent in adding house to house and field to field, and one deposit in the funds to another, the remainder is almost entirely absorbed in looking after these things, as the expression is—that is, in seeing that they are all safe, and made as productive as possible. Thus that separation from the weariness and distraction of a secular calling, which had been so long anticipated as a season fraught with important benefits, often becomes, in its turn, a burden, or, at best, is not attended with those advantages to the individual, or to others, that were expected from it. There are not a few in this class who should never have relinquished their old pursuits;—they have been shut up to them so long, and so closely, as never to be really at home apart from them.

In the conduct of such men, however, there is much more to censure than to pity. Their excuses, as to the substance of them, are mere excuses. The individuals who urge them frequently deceive themselves, in supposing that they partake at all of Christianity; and as surely as they do partake of it, they will not act upon the vain pretensions we have noticed without drawing down the displeasure of the Almighty. Not give a fair space of time to reading, reflection, and prayer!—there may be want of inclination for this, but, in the case of the unoccupied, there can rarely be any other want. Not know how to be active in the cause of the Redeemer, while so many plans of

usefulness are afloat among us, and plans including, of necessity, so much of the exact machinery of worldly business!—the plea is a base mockery. Not know how to do good, in a world where evil and suffering present themselves through all the stages of life, from the feeblest infancy to the man of grey hairs, from the lowest pauper to the proudest noble!—who can believe it? Will it obtain credence in a dying hour, or at the bar of God? And as to avoiding all serious occupation, unless stimulated by the old inducement, filthy lucre, there is something in it so truly odious, as connected with a pretension to Christianity, that the man who has not been unfortunate enough to have seen such instances of miserable delusion may perhaps be excused in doubting their existence.

Let every man, then, to whom these remarks are applicable, examine those scriptures well which speak of the value of time, and of the account to be rendered concerning it. Happily, there are men possessing the talents by which fortunes are realized, who have learnt to deem it their imperative obligation, and their high privilege, to consecrate them daily to the cause of religion and humanity. And among those who are thus active and efficient as labourers in the vineyard of the church, are many who have been successful in their enterprises among the men of the world.

The unoccupied are also exposed to much danger from the slow, and almost imperceptible

manner, in which the habit of indolence and its attendant evils make their advances. An unemployed man is the same thing with an idle man, and idleness is not only a sin in itself, but one which must lead to others. We have remarked, in another place, on the connexion between indolence and insincerity; and have noticed its influence in disposing men to adopt corrupt views of the gospel. But these are not the only dangerous attendants on this vice. Justice was described by the ancients as having leaden feet and iron hands, slow in its progress, but resistless when it comes. It is much the same with idleness; it creeps on, as though a worm in feebleness, but secures every step it has gained as with a giant strength. Now this mixture of deceitfulness and power which belongs to the habit of indolence belongs equally to all those vices which are fostered by indolence, to that spirit of insincerity, that profane handling of the word of God, that fretfulness, that avarice, that sensuality, that hardness of heart,—in a word, to that irreligion, in all its forms, of which idleness is so commonly the parent and the nurse. These all creep on with the same apparent feebleness, and hold their place of influence, when obtained, with the same strong hand; they are as the blight by which the tree is deprived of its blossom, its bud, and, at length, of its very leaves and existence. The idler is a vicious man; and it is only by vicious reasoning, and a vicious interpretation of holy scripture, that he can soothe his

conscience, or at all justify his ways. He has no grave duties to occupy him; and by his restlessness, and sometimes by his ill-humour, about the veriest trifles, he gradually becomes an annoyance to himself and to all about him. He has done with getting money; and that very thought perhaps constrains him to attach an idolatrous value to what he has secured. The day sometimes passes heavily along, and tempts him to luxuriate at the table, and tarry at the wine; and as the habits of a man centre thus in himself, the less can he think of others, and the harder must his heart grow. Thus the individual who lives without an object, is in danger of living to many vices, and is in especial peril from the insidious manner in which these evils make their advances. They may be sometimes seen extending their gloomy and withering power by steps as slow, and yet as regular, as those of the evening shadows, or as the approach of winter. The space allotted to sleep, and lounging, is gradually increased; while that assigned to private devotion, domestic religion, or public duty, is in the same proportion lessened. The services of the sanctuary are less valued, less attended, and more frequently a topic of complaint. Christians are regarded with less affection, and less candour; are exposed to many injurious insinuations, sometimes to loud and unmerited censures. The scale of contribution to religious or charitable objects is gradually contracted; and the scale of expense, in some other respects, is

perhaps in the same degree enlarged. One indulgence is followed by another still more dangerous, and one excuse by another still more futile, until the mind becomes the place of all selfishness, and of all subtlety. No care has been taken to make the good seed grow, and the bad has come up in its room; the soil *would* bear something, and, wickedly neglected, it has borne the weed, the thorn, and the brier. This was the main occasion of those iniquities which brought the judgment from heaven on the cities of the plain—*pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.*

It is delightful to know that there are Christians who obtain grace to withstand these dangers. There are others, however, who, though not overpowered by them, still suffer very seriously from them; and, unhappily, there are those who are no sooner placed within the vortex adverted to, than they show their total want of that strength of principle which could alone enable them to stand in the evil day. The intoxicating cup approaches them; and, though they perish, they will drink of it.

It follows, that we cannot too gravely consider the various motives which should induce the unoccupied to guard against the perils of their circumstances. Such persons are expected to become blessings to the church, and to the world; and the motives which should lead to this end, will assuredly possess a marked influence over us in

proportion as we are Christians. Can we meditate on the example of Christ, as enforcing benevolent activity, and not be moved by it? There was no necessity resting on him to become active on our behalf; no evil, no defectiveness of character, could have been proved against him, if he had chosen to remain for ever in that rest and glory which he had with the Father before the world was; yet he came to the earth in the form of a servant, and went about doing good, accomplishing his generous errand by means of industry almost incredible, and in the midst of sufferings much beyond our understanding. He was rich, and for our sakes became poor; infinitely happy, and for our cause became a man of sorrows; the Prince of Life, and, that he might befriend us, deigned to be numbered with the dead. To do good was evidently dearer to him than the kingdoms of the earth, or the glories of heaven, dearer than repose, or honour, or even life itself. Away, then, with that device, which would tell a selfish useless professor that he may, by possibility, be a Christian.

But, if the *example* of Christ can teach thus powerfully, what shall we say of his *gifts*—the blessings of his salvation? Of these, no tongue can adequately speak, no mind conceive. They embrace a deliverance from infinite evil, the possession of infinite good; a claim upon the kingdom of heaven, in virtue of the Saviour's righteousness, and a fitness for the enjoyment of it by means

of his sovereign grace. Surely, then, we are not our own, *we are bought with a price*; we are not called to impossible services, but to services for which strength has been provided. We are therefore without excuse,—yea, unutterably criminal, if we fail to *glorify God in our bodies and our spirits, which are his*. This is a work to which the honest inquirer shall be made equal; a service which shall be made his delight, and one in which there shall be no failure. Let us, then, call our obligations into frequent remembrance, along with the many facts which concur to make our duty our blessedness. We have seen in what it consists; we see to what it is opposed. Let the great maxim, then, never be forgotten, that where much is given, much is expected; and let not a trivial independence, in regard to a few particulars of present life, estrange us from a due feeling of dependence upon God, or from that fraternal reliance on each other, which nature, providence, and the gospel, concur to impose. Let us beware of vain excuses, if inclined to stand all the day idle, bearing in mind, that their vanity will be fully exposed at last; and let us watch, and strive against the creeping power of indolence, and its kindred vices, as we would against a mortal pestilence, against a disease stealing its way to the vitals. Neither let it be forgotten, that they are the labouring only who know what the sweetness of rest means; that they are the indolent only to whom time is ever a burden; and that God;

in his manifold wisdom and grace, has thus made the necessity of exertion to be, in no small measure, the necessity of enjoyment. It is manifestly the parent of health and firmness, whether relating to the body or the mind.

Above all, it will behove the unoccupied professor to reflect, that if he be useless he must be worse, much worse than useless. The penurious rich man must ever operate as a foul blight on the spirit of liberality around him. The selfish find an abundant excuse in appealing to his wretched example. It is the same when men of leisure refuse exertion in behalf of the church or of society. The occupied appeal to the conduct of such men, and deem their own negligence no longer censurable. It is true, the man of one talent ought not to neglect it, because the man who has a greater number is negligent; but the conduct of the greater sinner puts him into a state of greater temptation to do thus wickedly. As surely as we possess talents, whether in the character of our mind, in the shape of property, or in the command of time, we must become a signal blessing, or a signal curse, sending abroad the healthy stimulus of a Christian example, or diffusing the poison of its opposite—prime agents, in propelling others toward the abodes of the blessed or of the lost. The Son of Man came *not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

CHAP. XIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —PROSPERITY.

—————Little knows
Any, but God alone, to value right
The good before him, but perverts best things
To worst abuse, or to their meanest use.

MILTON.

OUR difference of judgment in regard to human life, is, in a great degree, the effect of a peculiar temperament, and is sometimes materially affected by our occasional feelings. At all times, the passions have much to do, in this respect, with the decisions of the reason. There are moments when we readily adopt the most gloomy estimate of present existence, and are prepared to sympathize with the strongest things that may be said as to its vanity and unhappiness. We regard the place of our sojourn as a vale of tears; we look upon it as a region of false hope—a scene where delusion and suffering are much too complicated to be described. In the language of one who knew it well, we say of it, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.* And there is a sense in which all this is true. The

world, considered as a means of enabling us to reach the true end and felicity of our being, is, indeed, an idle pageant, even at best.

There is a sense, however, in which such descriptions of our present dwelling-place, and of our present lot, are by no means accurate. The world, like the universe of which it forms a part, is worthy of him who made it; it is a noble object, and has been a memorial, through all generations, of his many attributes who gave it being and preserves it. Nor is the cup of human life made up of bitterness. The face of nature is not always veiled in darkness, nor always shadowed with a cloudy sky; and the reign of winter does not last for ever. There are the blue heavens, and the glorious sun; the animation of spring, the beauties of summer, and the abundance of autumn. Man is served by all these, and might be in a greater measure, did not his folly and his sin prevent. *God crowneth the year with his goodness, and all his paths drop fatness.* It is true, there are still sorrows, and sickness, and death; but it is equally true, that while it is appointed unto men once to die, in life there is more of health than sickness, and in all our ways more of natural good than of natural evil. How few are the seasons in which the body is the seat of suffering compared with those in which it is, upon the whole, in a state of ease; and in the experience of the mind a similar order of things might be shown as existing.

But it must not be supposed, from these facts,

that there is more of religious or moral good in men than of its opposite. The secret of this arrangement is, that God *hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities*. Had he so done, the place of our abode must soon have lost its light, and beauty, and abundance; for men are *sold under sin*. It is the present state of their nature to be *at enmity with God*. None of them *seek after him—no, not one*. High as the heavens are above the earth, so great has the mercy of their Creator been towards them. His plan of mercy, in the hands of a Mediator, while filling their hearts with food and gladness, supplies them with the space, the motives, and the means, that should lead to repentance. Thus it is redeeming love which makes their days cheerful, their nights refreshing, their enterprises prosperous, opening all the sources of present enjoyment, as well as the visions of a better country.

In reflecting on the Christian warfare as connected with Prosperity, the sense in which this term is employed should be distinctly understood. The word prosperity is sometimes used as being of the same meaning with the term—success. Thus it is written, that *the Lord made all that Joseph did to prosper*; and another scripture states, that whatsoever such a man doeth *shall prosper*. The general application of the term, however, is to denote such a state of present circumstances as men have agreed to consider desirable. This

must include adequate means of support, either as derived from a worldly calling, or as independent of such pursuits. It must also embrace general health, a fair reputation, and, in the case of most men, the elements of friendship, or of domestic comfort. We do not regard the man as prosperous who has to contend with incessant difficulty in providing against the pressure of necessity ; nor are we accustomed to attach the idea which the term prosperity conveys to the circumstances of those who are wasting under sickness, who are degraded by calumny, or who are exposed to the bitterness of dissension or to unsympathizing solitude from the nature of their connexions.

By the prosperous, therefore, we understand those who possess the means of much present good, persons who have the ease, the credit, and the gratifications of our world, in a considerable degree at command. *The prosperity of fools, saith Jehovah, shall destroy them ; but whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil.* This passage sets two classes of persons before us as subject to the influence of the above circumstances. These persons are the foolish and the wise, or, in other words, the irreligious and the devout. In the case of the former, the things of prosperity are the ministers of destruction. In the case of the latter, there are means of preservation ; so that where others perish, these dwell in safety, quietness, and confidence. There are two points which immediately present

themselves on the subject of this chapter—the Dangers of Prosperity, and the Means by which Christians are secured against them.

I. With respect to the dangers which are ever attendant on a state of prosperity, we must recollect that these do not arise from the things themselves which constitute such a state. Health, competence, reputation, domestic pleasures,—these are things which cannot in themselves be evil; their only effect upon us should be an increase of gratitude, of affectionate confidence, and of cheerful obedience, in relation to the Being from whom they proceed. If different results follow, the cause must be sought, not in the gifts, neither in the Giver, but in the recipient. If prosperity shall prove destructive, or in any degree injurious, there must be properties attaching to those in whom its influence is thus exhibited, which have the power of converting food into poison, of causing the things which should nourish to become the means of death. In nature, there are some substances which can assimilate others to their own baser qualities, when placed in contact with them; and it is the depravity of man which makes the blessings of prosperity so generally conducive to evil, as to give them the appearance of curses rather than of blessings. Viewed only in their effects, they often resemble the treacherous bestowments of some malignant adversary more than the generous bounty of infinite benevolence. So

commonly are they allied with the extremes of irreligion, as to have the appearance of producing them ; whereas, the law, with respect to all intelligent and perfect natures, is, that the more they receive from God, the more do they partake of the spirit of godliness. That it should be so much otherwise with men is not only a proof that the human heart is *deceitful*, but that it is *desperately wicked*.

The source of danger, then, is not from without ; it is not from the world, nor from the influence, however subtle or powerful, of that malevolent nature who is called the god of this world ; its place is within us, in the state of our own spirit ; and there are four respects in which this enfeebled and perverted condition of our nature is often found to manifest itself in the seasons of prosperity. These may be described as consisting in Self-indulgence, Worldliness of spirit and conduct, Forgetfulness of God, and an impious Independence of the Divine government.

With regard, then, to SELF-INDULGENCE, it is obvious, that where there are the most ample means of gratifying it, there is always the greatest danger of its becoming dominant ; and such means are ever at the bidding of the prosperous. Those scriptures which speak of the table as *a snare*, of gluttony as a kind of *idolatry* ; which tell us that we are not to *make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof* ; that we are rather to mortify the body, to deny ourselves, and to

consider temperance as an indispensable preliminary to patience and godliness ;—all these are scriptures, which, from the frequency of their recurrence, must have an important meaning. They do not say that Christians should become monks ; they do not teach that we should reject what has been mercifully bestowed upon us as means of nourishment and comfort—still less that we should subject the flesh to voluntary torture. It may be a greater sin to abuse the gifts of God than not to use them ; but both are sins. To do *less* than God enjoins, may be to contract a greater guilt than would be incurred in attempting to do *more* ; but guilt must follow in both instances, since both are at variance with a proper deference to Divine authority. It is to put some other rule in the place of that which is alone infallible and complete ; and, in this sense,—*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. But passing over the idle sophistry to which we are sometimes obliged to listen on this subject, it is plain that the passages to which we have alluded describe a course of life, from which the prosperous are ever under a strong temptation to depart.

Such men have only to speak, and the means of indulgence are before them. Their wishes only need be known, and their palate will be hourly consulted ; their wines will sparkle in the glass ; and earth, and air, and sea will give up their stores to perpetuate the many pleasures which have their seat in the senses. Thus the purpose of the man whose lands brought forth plentifully was to *eat*,

drink, and be merry, during the remainder of his days. And that other child of fortune, who was *clothed in purple and fine linen*, is described as *faring sumptuously every day*.

It is certain, also, that indulgence in this form will lead to the same evil in other shapes. The epicure is usually a sluggard: and where men allow the animal nature to gain this marked ascendancy over the rational, they almost inevitably become hard-hearted. Always careful as to their own comforts, they have no time to be concerned about those of their neighbour. Hence it sometimes becomes a daily employment to wear down the sensibilities of the heart, and to blind the conscience, that the mind may be at ease in its degradation as the mere slave of the body. The love of ease occasions a constant war with all love of mankind; the claims of humanity being always in the way when prosecuting plans of selfish indulgence.

We need say nothing with a view to demonstrate that results like these are often attendant on prosperity; and the baseness of such a life must be sufficiently manifest. What is said by Moses of the ancient Hebrews, may be said of the prosperous generally; and too often, in no small measure, of prosperous Christians. *The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. So the Lord alone did lead him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the field; and he made him to suck honey out of the*

rock, and oil out of the flinty rock ; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat ; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun waxed fat ; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.

How the manner of life we have described should lead to worldliness of spirit and conduct, will be easily perceived. The present state of man is affirmed to be, *of the earth, earthy*. It is the tendency of human nature to regard earthly pleasures as the main end of life ; and where there are most of the requisites to obtain such pleasures, there is the greatest probability of their being sought under this mistaken impression as to their true value and design. The prosperous have all the channels of gaiety and dissipation open to them ; and, as surely as they are prosperous, there will not be wanting those who will beckon them onward in forbidden paths. The first impulse of human nature is to do as required ; but difficulties, perhaps, interpose, partly from the suggestions of prudence, partly from the dictates of conscience. These it may take some time to remove : but what appeared at first to be unlawful, becomes, in a little while, matter of doubt, and the next step is to comply with it. In this manner an absorbing worldliness is often allowed to put aside the claims both of religion and of humanity. Dress, furniture, equipage, fashionable parties, all have their

fascinations, are at command, and all serve to weave out the snare of the destroyer.

The victims of disease and sorrow, of poverty and want, how little have they to endear the earth to them? With such it is indeed a wilderness, a prison-house. But the man who can call his dwelling his own, and the lands which encircle it his own; or who, in any place, can soon surround himself with abundance; how hard a lesson has he to learn if he would overcome the world, or use it as not abusing it! His pride, his vanity, his sensual taste, all dispose him to comply, when urged to conform himself with the course of things around him. The broad way, which leads to the chambers of death, is smoothed at his presence; and, on either side, allurements are crowded forth, which do not obtrude themselves on the notice of the children of adversity. Thus the tendency of each earthly blessing, unless sanctified by religion, is to render us more earthly, and more fearful of death; more opposed to what is heavenly, and more enslaved to the tendencies of the lost. A new tie, in every such case, is added to the present; and a new power is given to the feeling which induces a shrinking from the future.

We have mentioned FORGETFULNESS OF GOD as another dangerous consequence often found in the train of prosperity. When did David learn to forget his Maker? Not while watching his sheep-fold, nor while flying from the face of Saul. It was when at rest in his greatness, as the monarch of

the chosen people. What was the state which Moses saw as most pregnant with danger to the Israelites? These are his words—*When thou shalt have eaten, and art full, THEN beware lest thou forget the Lord that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.* And as the man of God feared it would be, so it was. Israel, when the season came, lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. When men grow rich, they generally forget the companions of their poverty. And that gospel which is preached to the poor,—how commonly is it forgotten when men reach the level of those who have learnt to put some fashionable corruption in its room; their Christianity being a thing to be determined by the taste of the new caste to which they aspire, as much as the most trivial thing that fashion may influence.

In adversity, though the heart be as hard as that of Pharaoh, there are moments when men are constrained to ask that the Lord may be *entreated for them*. But, while no evil presses to require the intervention of mercy, they too commonly live as though there were no God:—the affairs of life glide on, and, leaving them insensible to their dependance on divine aid, the thought of such dependance is excluded from their mind. So long as the calm lasts, the Almighty may be as one who sleeps. It is when the storm threatens, that his presence is remembered;—then, his commanding word is felt to be of infinite moment.

The church, like individuals, has had her seasons

of prosperity ; and these, as in the case of individuals, have been frequently followed by intervals of fiery trial. It has then become manifest, that the time in which the enemy sows his seed in greatest profusion, is when Christians are allowed to repose beneath the sunshine of worldly favour. While that favour lasts, the wheat and the tares grow up together : but, in times of persecution, the Son of God comes forth with his winnow in his hand, that he may cleanse his floor ; and a separation takes place between the precious and the vile, resembling that which is to mark the proceedings of the last day. The men who abide at such seasons, are those who have learnt to *endure hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ*. And to this, the habits of the self-indulgent and the worldly are soon found to have been most unfavourable. The man of pampered flesh must faint when exposed to severe privation, or considerable suffering. The mind, whose busy thoughts have been absorbed in a multitude of little things, is far below the greatness necessary to enduring the cross—despising the shame ! Not a few, also, who are engaged in less trivial pursuits, must still be described as forgetting God : and estranged from the contemplation of his excellencies, such men fall into every kind of delusion as to their own character, their obligations, and their prospects hereafter. Notwithstanding all his mercifulness, they have been unmindful of the God of Truth, and have become the dupes of error as a punish-

ment. It is a fearful thing when men do not *like to retain God in their knowledge*. It was this evil which fastened the curse of a reprobate mind on the ancient heathen; and their abused prosperity is assigned as one of the causes of so much depravity. There is a sin, however, to which the abuse of prosperity leads, which is even more to be dreaded. We refer to that IMPIOUS INDEPENDENCE OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT with which prosperous men are too frequently chargeable. On this point the language of Job is especially forcible and instructive:—*Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. THEREFORE they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit should we have if we pray unto him?* The case of Nebuchadnezzar will both illustrate and confirm this description. Hear his words:—*Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for a house of the kingdom, by the might of MY power, and for the honour of MY majesty.*

Prosperous men, if they do not adopt this

precise language, are always in danger of participating in its spirit. Success disposes them to cherish a vain confidence in their own ability. In addition to which, *men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself*; and thus, in prosperity, we are exposed to evil by means of vanity within and flattery without; and the higher we ascend, the more difficult is the contest which we have to maintain against these insidious opponents. One monarch was assured by his sycophants, that even the waves of the sea could not fail to obey him; and human nature, whether in a court or a village, is every where the same. What the scriptures require is not that we should be insensible to the value of the gifts conferred upon us; but that we should remember from whom we have received them, and judge wisely as to their efficacy and design. But to such a state of mind, a true sense of religion is necessary. It is from the want of such impressions, that men learn to speak of having made themselves what they are, or of having been, in their favourite language,—the architects of their own fortune. It is not easy to receive much praise, without indulging in some mistaken notions with regard to our deservings. Nor do men often realize property, or power, by means of their industry, or ability, without indulging in many vain thoughts as to their peculiar proficiency.

This spirit of self-elatement, however, is directly opposed to the spirit of a devout faith. It is nothing less, though it may not be so regarded,

than to put ourselves in the place of Him who is the source of all being and of all bountifulness. It is to affect a controul over matters which he has declared to be entirely in his own hand. It is to deny that he alone *putteth up one, and taketh down another*. The man whose prosperity shall be permitted to teach him such lessons, may indulge his secret atheism for a season, but the time is at hand when he will find that the God with whom he has to do is a being *who will not give his glory to another*.

Such are some of the dangers attending prosperity. We say *some* of them, because, in what we have advanced, the subject has been rather hinted at than exhausted. Among the effects of that state of mind which disposes men to an abuse of the goodness of providence, we have to number many of the most atrocious deeds, and much of the most intense suffering known in our world. And with regard to those seeds of misery which iniquity of this kind will be found to have sown hereafter,—who can speak of them?

It must be obvious, also, that these dangers never prove so formidable as in the case of those who become prosperous suddenly. Such transitions require a habit of self-government which few possess. The eye is not framed to pass at once from darkness to the light. The new state into which such a man is brought, is like that strong drink which is said to be a mocker; and we know of this that men strange to it may not suddenly indulge in it without injury. Hence, a prosperity

speedily obtained, is often speedily demoralizing and ruinous.

II. We must now proceed to notice the Means by which Christians are secured against these dangers. It would be well if we could speak of the means of preservation which believers possess, as being a security to the fullest extent. But, unhappily, though not borne away by the stream, the best are often impeded, and sometimes materially injured by it. They endure to the end, but it is not without many an interval of weariness and fainting. The war is continued, and victory is obtained; but there are parts of the day when the scale turns on the side of Amalek, and Israel suffers from the sword of the enemy. The religion of believers may not be destroyed, but it may be lamentably weakened and sullied. Men who do not lose their Christianity, may become so far unmindful of their vows as to present a very mutilated view of it in their own character, and in this way may bring a reproach upon it. Thus the prosperity which destroys the fool may injure the wise; and unless the wise adopt the greatest precautions against it, we may venture to affirm that effects like these will assuredly follow.

In proceeding to notice the means by which Christians are preserved, in their measure, against the dangers of prosperity, we must not forget that THE EFFICACY OF THESE MEANS IS WHOLLY DEPENDANT ON THE AIDS OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT. David felt this

when he prayed, *Take not thy Holy Spirit from me*, and when he entreated, saying, *Uphold me by thy free Spirit*. Hence Paul implored, in behalf of the Ephesians, that God would *strengthen them with all might by his Spirit in the inner man*. It is from the influence of the Holy Spirit that believers derive sound judgment, an enlightened conscience, right affections, and, as the general effect, *a conversation becoming the gospel*. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord*. The means which the Spirit disposes the Christian to employ, that he may escape the snares of prosperity, are various; and to these our attention must now be directed.

The benevolent design of the Spirit of God is sometimes promoted, by leading the believer to meditate on THE UNCERTAINTIES which are inseparable from the most prosperous condition on earth. If health be an essential ingredient in the cup of prosperity, who can say that it shall continue? If competence be needful to such a state, who can say that no fraud, no accident shall reach it? If friendship be much valued, may not friends prove fickle, or treacherous, or may not death remove them? If a good name be as precious ointment, how soon may some dead fly be allowed to destroy its savour, or some breath of calumny fall upon the tender plant and wither it? If intellectual distinction be coveted, may not some shock of disease suddenly unstore the memory, prostrate the reason, and send a spirit of slumber over all

the powers of the imagination? Aware that all these changes may be at the door of the most prosperous man on earth, the Christian is urged to seek after something more certain than the possessions of the prosperous. The culprit whose life is spared to-day, does not say it is enough if he may be called to the place of execution to-morrow. To be respited is something, to be saved is every thing—he wants certainty. Now this, which is true of life, is true of every thing which makes life precious; and the disciple of the cross is made sensible, that it is not in any good which may be conferred to-day and withdrawn to-morrow that the wise should trust. Their resting place should be on something retained by a better tenure,—if possible, by charter, and for ever! This prevents the believer from confiding in uncertain riches, or in any object, however desirable, which is possessed on the same precarious terms, and disposes him to rejoice in the unalterable promises of covenant mercy, and in the prospect of an inheritance which may not pass away.

From meditation on the uncertainties of a prosperous state, the mind readily passes to remark its **BREVITY** even when most extended. The prosperities of the world are never in one stay. They are matters ever passing from hand to hand, and from one generation to another. Men do not bring them into the world, nor can they take them out of it. In the grave there are none of them: in the world of spirits they are mostly unknown; and in

the last day, will scarcely leave a trace behind. Who, then, would be so little-minded, so base, as to go no higher in search of the great or the happy? Who, knowing that he must live through eternity, would be satisfied with a treasure, which, at best, can only procure him an amusement which must soon prove as transient and as empty as a dream of the night? Paul will teach us on this matter:—*This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this passeth away.*

Hence we observe that the Christian is taught to judge wisely as to the REAL WORTH of prosperity. The worldly have preferred it as their chief good, and it is natural that they should magnify it. Having chosen it as their portion, it must be their concern to view it in the best light. They live solely to this kind of good; and it is to be expected that they will endeavour to persuade themselves, and to persuade others, that it is a good to which it is well to live. Not so the believer: he has a nobler heritage in reserve, and, in consequence, can afford to put all present acquisitions into the balance of truth. Having little to fear from any exhibition of the vanity of earthly things, his eyes are open to see what prosperity may do and what it may not do. It may purchase splendour, luxury,

flattery; but it cannot ensure health, or heal a wounded conscience; it cannot extinguish the envy of those who may be witnesses of our state, nor is it of any avail as opposed to the arm of the king of terrors. It may demoralize the sober, it may stain the garments of the devout, it may add to our bondage through the fear of death, but it can do nothing to make the head or the heart better. It adds nothing to the man, while adding much to his circumstances. It may prepare him for the chambers of the second death, it can bestow no meetness for the mansions of the blessed.

Thus the weakness of prosperity is more obvious than its strength; and the harm it may do, both in regard to this world and the next, is more obvious than the good. Every Christian, in proportion to his spirituality, must discern and feel these conclusions, and is thus taught to look somewhere apart from the mere circumstances of the present world, in search of his best comforts and hopes. The gospel, he perceives, is the only remedy adequate to his wants, and its price accordingly is above rubies. It can do every thing; while with regard to the prosperities of the world, we know much more of their power to enslave and destroy than of any thing else concerning them. There be many that say, *Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.*

When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble ?

The Christian is further constrained by the Divine Spirit to meditate, in the season of prosperity, on the ACCOUNTABLENESS which must ever attach to such a state. *Who maketh thee to differ, or what hast thou which thou hast not received ? And if thou hast received it, wherefore dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?* This language is not less applicable to the arrangements of providence in relation to us, than to the work of grace in the soul. Both are from God; and the advantages of both are so many talents which should be consecrated to the divine glory. Health, property, and time; the approval of men, the pleasures of friendship, and the sweets of domestic quietude and enjoyment—all are from the same source. What is more, these are not only the bestowments of mercy, but of mercy exercised through the most costly medium. They are all the purchase of his sacrifice who took our griefs upon him; and who, by means of his sorrows and his death, opened that channel through which the divine benevolence pours down its various blessings upon us. These blessings, therefore, are all seen by the Christian as flowing to the unworthy, and as bought with an infinite price. Can he know this, feel this, and still imitate those who seek their portion in this life ? The true expression of love to Him who so loved us is, to dedicate ourselves, and all that we have received from him, at once to

his honour : it is to say, *What shall I render unto God for all his benefits ?*

It must be distinctly observed, also, that Christians are saved from many of the snares of prosperity in this world BY MEANS OF THEIR ACQUAINTANCE WITH A BETTER. If the earth were our only dwelling place, and what it includes our only means of happiness, then, defective as these may be, it would not be unreasonable to employ our best skill and effort with a view to extract from them the largest possible amount of good. We should, in such a case, have a sorry portion ; but, as these things would be our all, our whole heart might not very irrationally be given to them. This, however, is not our state : the gospel has brought *life and immortality to light*. And when told that we are not to give our best homage, or our best affections, to the world in which we live, it is on the ground of the fact that there is another world placed before us which is more worthy of them ; one where prosperity is separated from its present defilements and imperfectness, and is attained as an everlasting possession : accordingly, *this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith*. We see, in the case of Moses, what this principle can do ; and we know how it sustained the patriarchs, and prophets, and a multitude beside, in old time, *of whom the world was not worthy*. The things which are seen and temporal are not to be placed on their proper level except as viewed in comparison with the unseen and eternal. And the

more we possess of earth the more is it needed that we possess an enlarged view of the glories of heaven, that we may not remain the slaves of earth.

The Christian is, moreover, a man of PRAYER; and it is from this exercise especially that he derives the strength which enables him to escape the vices of prosperity. It is in such exercises, or in answer to them, that his reasonings, on the matters now considered, are made clear, impressive, and practical. It is this which disposes him to meditation, and which enables him to meditate wisely. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* Watchfulness will not be sufficient without prayer, nor will prayer avail without watchfulness. These go together, when men overcome, and lay hold on eternal life.

Prosperity, when thus reviewed, fails to excite the envy of the Christian. The dangers which encircle those who partake of it, cannot be really seen without exciting pity and alarm, nor without leading the heart to pray that the blindness and ruin so often attendant on such a state may not follow. But while alive to much in the condition of the prosperous, rendering it little desirable, the believer is far from considering it as inseparable from irreligion. Its advantages are the gifts of heaven; and when employed with a reference to the divine glory, conduce in an eminent degree to the good of society and the advancement of religion. When thus blessed, it serves to exhibit the

power of religion in counteracting tendencies which sometimes appear to be almost irresistible; and its only effect, in relation to men, is to place them within a larger circle of beneficence. But while the instances in which the advantages of prosperity are far otherwise applied are so numerous, the humble Christian learns to be content, and can deliberately prefer a sanctified adversity, to the fearful probability of being found to abuse the mercies of a different condition.

He looks abroad into the varied field
 Of nature, and though poor, perhaps, compar'd
 With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
 Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
 His are the mountains, and the vallies his,
 And the resplendent rivers. His t' enjoy
 With a propriety that none can feel,
 But who with filial confidence inspired
 Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
 And smiling say—"My Father made them all."
 Are they not his by a peculiar right,
 And by an emphasis of interest his,
 Whose eye they fill with tears of holy joy,
 Whose heart with praise, and whose exalted mind,
 With worthy thoughts of that unwearied love
 That planned, and built, and still upholds, a world
 So clothed with beauty for rebellious man?
 Yes—ye may fill your garners, ye that reap
 The loaded soil, and ye may waste much good
 In senseless riot; but ye will not find
 In feast, or in the chase, in song or dance,
 A liberty like his, who, unimpeached
 Of usurpation, and to no man's wrong,
 Appropriates nature as his Father's work,
 And has a richer use of yours than you.

COWPER.

In conclusion, it is worthy of careful recollection, that the accidents in our history which have

brought the greatest suffering along with them, have generally come upon us when least expected, and when, in consequence, we were least on our guard against such approaches. They who go down to the sea in ships can tell, that, in this way, the calm is often more destructive than the storm. The traveller, who has escaped unhurt amid the most dangerous passes of the mountain, has frequently incurred material injury in riding listlessly across the plain. When beset with difficulty, or assailed by opposition, we put forth all our vigilance and effort accordingly; but when these are no longer felt, and we begin to relax, the hour of evil has arrived. Thus it is in the ordinary affairs of life; and thus it is, in at least an equal degree, in the experience of the Christian. We are never so much exposed to the pressures of adversity as when we think ourselves most secured against them; and among the most prevalent results of prosperity, we may reckon this ominous species of presumption. It is as true of all the evils which belong to the present state, as of the last in the series,—in an hour when we think not they come.

CHAP. XIV.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —ADVERSITY.

————— Methinks if you would know
How visitations of calamity
Affect the pious soul, 'tis shown ye there!
Look yonder at that cloud, which through the sky
Sailing alone, doth cross in her career
The rolling moon! I watched it as it came,
And deemed the dark opaque would blot her beams;
But melting like a wreath of snow, it hangs
In folds of wavy silver round, and clothes
The orb with richer beauties than her own,
Then, passing, leaves her in her light serene.

SOUTHEY.

THE sacred writings abound with exhortations to duty: and these are so many proofs of human depravity. There is a need of them, or they would not have been recorded; but man ought not to have needed them. *Remember them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.* Language of this nature implies that there is room to fear, lest the duties to which it refers, obvious as they may seem, should not only be neglected, or imperfectly performed, but wholly forgotten. It may be, that where adversity is the effect, in part of weakness, and in part, perhaps, of more censurable causes, there will often be some difficulty in determining the measure of sympathy that

should be shown toward it. But the cases are innumerable, in which evils of this kind are not to be traced to such sources; and in all cases, it is the safest, the most Christian course, if we must err, to err on the side of forbearance and charity—*as being ourselves also in the body.*

The object intended, by our present reference to a state of Adversity, will perhaps be best accomplished by considering it in three respects—its Evils, its Dangers, and its Remedies.

I. In adverting to the Evils which the children of adversity endure, we purpose to do little more than name some of the more observable:—the briefest review of these, may assist in placing the subject more completely before us.

Many devout persons are called to pass extended intervals, sometimes a series of years, in a state of SICKNESS. The body, subject to frequent returns of suffering, confined to its chamber, or stretched on its bed, becomes the monitor of the soul, suggesting much as to the iniquity of our trespasses. To such, the night is often a season of painful watchings, unrelieved by forgetfulness or repose, yielding nothing of renovated strength; and what to them are the glorious sun, the green earth, the refreshing breeze, or the animation and hope supplied by nature's beauties and abundance? What to them are the many pleasures of social intercourse, or of active life? To such persons, these often are as though they were not.

POVERTY is another form of adversity. This is an evil generally allied to care, disappointment, and suffering. Some are inured to it from their childhood, others are plunged into it from a state of comfort or affluence. In the former case, it sometimes gives much of the pervading force of habit to anxiety, mortification, and sorrow. In the latter, it frequently calls forth those violent agitations and griefs which the suddenness, or the marked character of the change, must have a tendency to excite. Much also of the bitterness of poverty springs from our sympathy with others. The parent could bear it all; but there are his children, and to see their wants unprovided for, their sanguine hopes blighted, this proves a burden not easy to be borne. What is thus true, with regard to children, is also true in reference to all the objects of affection. It is *their* suffering, more than our own, which makes the pressure of necessity so formidable an evil.

Then there are sufferings from REPROACH, to which both the rich and the poor are liable. Most men know what it is to have their faults blazoned abroad with malevolent industry, and to find them subject to the worst possible colouring? There are seasons in which the most praiseworthy of their actions are set forth as proceeding from the basest motives, and when not a few things are laid to their charge which they know not. It is seen, at such times, that envy and ill-will can devise the most ingenious modes of

detraction, and that men can become so depraved as willingly to seek their own pleasure in another's pain, their own elevation in another's overthrow. Christians are especially exposed to this kind of suffering. The earthly-minded are, necessarily, the enemies of Jesus Christ ; they must, in consequence, be opposed to his religion wherever they see it as it is ; and the language of reproach will always abound where malevolence abounds. Hence, in the language of scripture, to follow the Redeemer is to bear his cross. Where Christians are the objects of aversion, or contempt, there the elements of persecution are at work ; and these, as we have shown in a preceding chapter, betray themselves in innumerable shapes. The manner in which intolerance may develop itself will be determined by the circumstances of time and place, but its existence will generally follow from the causes we have noticed. It may not be allowed to avail itself of the prison, or the stake ; but it may inflict a more lingering, and, in consequence, a more suffering martyrdom.

THE BEREAVEMENTS OCCASIONED BY DEATH constitute another prevalent form of adversity. Losses of this nature are such as we fail to understand until called to experience them. There is a solemnity, an unearthliness, in such events, which we deeply feel, but cannot describe. There is something in the grief awakened by them, which the sight of the departed, and the thought of what must follow, could alone produce. The endeared

object dead! No one chord of sympathy left to vibrate, as we stand near, and sigh, and weep, and repeat the much-loved name! We feel at such moments as though belonging ourselves to the dead rather than the living;—our most ardent curiosity, and most earnest longing, being fixed on the invisible and the future. Not till then do we understand the renderings of his noble heart, who exclaimed, *O Absalom, my son! my son! Absalom, my son! would God I had died for thee!*

We shall only remark farther, that, in most minds, there are SECRET GRIEFS, the full nature of which is only known to the sufferer, and to the Searcher of hearts. There is a bitterness sometimes experienced, from which not only the stranger, but the nearest connexions are excluded. Burdens of this description will be more or less weighty, according to mental disposition, or the influences which may have moulded the character. The causes producing them are often complex, undefined, or such as the individual cannot bring himself to converse upon. As a Christian, he can speak of them to God; and it is chiefly in doing so that he finds his measure of relief.

To adversity, in all these shapes, the Christian is liable, in common with other men; and wherever such dispensations occur they bring the character to a kind of trial. They serve to call out the good or evil that may be within; and lamentable are the disclosures which are often made. During a considerable period in the history of the

church, it has pleased the Almighty that persecution should form the chief means of trial with his professed worshippers. But it must be evident, that he can render other means no less decisive in distinguishing between those who really serve him, and those who serve him not—between the form of godliness and the power of it. The trial of our faith, *being much more precious than of gold that perisheth*, shall not fail of taking place, because the wrath of pagan or popish persecution has been rendered comparatively harmless. It should be our daily prayer, that, as the effect of what God is doing in relation to us, *we may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.* Among the things of most importance to this end, is a careful attention to the Dangers which always belong, more or less, to a state of suffering.

II. One of the most obvious of these, results from our disposition, at such times, TO ENVY THE LOT OF THE PROSPEROUS. It has appeared that even Job was not without astonishment at the state of the ungodly, as compared with his own. He describes himself as trembling, while he inquires—*Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power ?* The afflictions of the man who urged this question included all the kinds of suffering we have enumerated. Disease and poverty, reproach, bereavement, and nameless sorrows,—all were appointed to him. But the wicked he

saw spending their days in wealth, and sending forth their little ones like a flock, no rod of God seeming to be upon them. Hence his earnest prayer—*Show me WHEREFORE thou contendest with me.* But Asaph speaks more plainly—*I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; for there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain, violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.* Here we have not only the envy which we are prone to cherish in the day of adversity, but some of its fruits. We see that it leads to distrust of God, to desponding views with regard to a religious life, and to all that is afflictive in perplexity and sorrow.

There is much evil in the temper, which says, *all the day long have I been plagued; I have cleansed my heart in vain;* and, unless checked, it must lead to

greater iniquity. Every movement of envious feeling is an act of rebellion against God, inasmuch as it involves a censuring of the Divine conduct in the distribution of present good. And as to its effects, of these we witness something in those acts of fraud, and evil-speaking, and violence, which have so long degraded the history of mankind. It is a passion too, which, if it be allowed to acquire strength in adversity, will probably survive it, and even in the most prosperous circumstances may prove powerful enough to continue the wretchedness of its victim. *Haman called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife; and Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said, moreover, Yea, Esther, the queen, did let no man come in with the king to the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate.*

And it should be well considered, that it is not the more favourable condition of those who are raised greatly above the level which we have ourselves attained that is most likely to create an envious state of feeling. In general, this passion is affected mainly by the little distinctions and prosperities of those who are in some trivial degree above us. We may not envy nobles; but we may

envy those who do; and may be so regarded, in our turn, by such as are near to us in the descending scale.

Envy, therefore, in proportion to its indulgence, is the parent of every evil work; and the season in which we are strongly disposed to cherish it is when drooping ourselves, or when doomed to witness the decay or the loss of the objects we value. It is a passion which places us at variance with man, and involves, as we have observed, rebellion against God. If, then, there be an evident tendency in adversity to foster this temper, it surely is a state that cannot be regarded by us with too much circumspection. To be saved from such effects should be the object of our deepest solicitude and most earnest prayer in the day of suffering.

Concerning that day, we have also to remark, that there is within us a strong disposition to indulge in FORBIDDEN FEELINGS TOWARDS THOSE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN THE OCCASION OF OUR SUFFERINGS. We live in a world where the evil, and not the good, preponderates. In a region where ambition, and covetousness, and envy, and malice, and all the other forms of depraved selfishness are dominant. It is to be expected, therefore, that we should suffer much from the hand of man. The injuries which befall us from this source can never excite surprise, except with the unreflecting.

Nor is there anything in adversity, when it comes, to protect us from further wrongs of this description. We may flatter ourselves, that, when

brought low, our very enemies must be at peace with us, and be disposed to pity, if not to befriend us. But, unhappily for human nature, this is rarely the case. It too often happens, that such persons, seeing they have less than ever to fear or hope from us, begin to speak and to do against us more wickedly than before. They talk of our sufferings, perhaps, as the brand which an offended God has fixed upon us ; and, under the influence of their base enmities, they learn to impute to us not only motives, but deeds, to which we are strangers. At such times, the feverish pleasures of revenge are too commonly preferred to the calmer, but far more desirable, gratifications of magnanimity. There is a culture of the soul, which is needed, in order to our making the better choice, at such junctures. *If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink.*

But natural as such a treatment may be, in so bad a world as ours, it is not easy to check the feeling of resentment when thus injured by calumny or violence. And when brought into embarrassment and want, through the folly or fraudulence of others, we too frequently forget the admonition—*Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord.* It is in human nature to return evil for evil. It is the work of Divine grace to *overcome evil with good.* When men do wrong, they should be admonished of the wrong ; and there are cases where the offending should be punished or avoided. But, in all such cases, the end proposed

should be the restoration of the delinquent,—the benefit of the evil-doer, and not his injury.

But who can review his hours of adversity, and find himself guiltless in this respect? How much wrath, and how much of that habitual resentment, which we denominate malice, do men, in general, exercise towards the instruments of the privations and evils which they experience? How much of this feeling is frequently observable, under such circumstances, even among professing Christians? What bitter words can they sometimes utter? What severities can they sometimes practise?

Where adversity is either occasioned or attended by much hard and unjust treatment, it not unfrequently produces a fixed spirit of misanthropy; and a secret, if not an open, contempt of all the great duties which men owe to each other. The impressions thus made have filled monasteries with professed separatists from the world. And were we to examine the history of those who have become, in various ways, the notorious violaters of the laws of society, we should probably find that not a few among them have been maddened into their manner of life by cruelties and oppressions. These remarks refer, of course, to those who have never been under the restraints of religion. But in human nature, there is that amount of sameness, which must render it certain that the causes producing a very strong impression on one man, will produce effects of the same kind on men generally. The injured or the disappointed, who

do not separate themselves from the abodes of men, may be persons who fair *would* do so; and if they fail to become notorious depredators, this may not be from the want of sufficient disgust or contempt in regard to their species.

When the Redeemer said, *Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you*, he spoke thus because he knew this course to be at once our duty and our interest, and to be just the opposite of that to which we are inclined when exposed to such treatment, or to any conduct betraying a similar temper in relation to us. Yes; and, as we have hinted, the evil dispositions which are called forth by adversity do not always leave their victim when adversity leaves him. They often go with him into far other circumstances. And the effect of the injury thus done to benevolent feeling, must be an injury done to religious feeling; for if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen? The only thing Christians have to fear in adversity is sin, and this must consist in one of two things—either in a failure of duty with respect to our fellow-men, or in the same thing with respect to God. Our love of the Divine Nature must include the love of mankind; but the latter without the former, if it may exist at all, must be seriously defective, and always liable to mutation and decay. Having then seen something of the manner in which unsanctified adversity operates with regard to men, we proceed to notice its too frequent working

in reference to God. Its tendency, in this respect, is sometimes such as TO EXCLUDE FROM THE MIND ALL IDEA OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE. When deeply afflicted by the course of events, we are often conscious of something approaching to a secret feeling that they are such as ought not to have occurred. We may not presume to *say* thus much; but there are moments when we perceive that the language of the heart has been to this effect. And if the state of things which has given existence to this feeling is to be regarded as the immediate appointment of God, the feeling adverted to must partake of gross impiety, since to him it must refer. But, to avoid this serious consequence, it is sometimes denied that the agency of the Supreme Ruler is of this immediate description. It is deemed better to affirm that God does not meddle with our small affairs, than to concede that we have dared to censure his manner of proceeding. In other words, it is considered well to shut the eye against the manifestations of his glory, because we lack the inclination to do it a proper homage.

There is room to conclude that this is often a main cause of the opposition shewn to the doctrine of a special providence. The depravity which leads some men to say, *there is no God*, disposes others, less matured in impiety, to limit the divine agency as much as possible. As men contract their views with regard to what God has done for them, they become less sensible as to what is due

from themselves in return; and, by this process, the feeling of apprehension is naturally diminished. There is a proneness in men to forget God, and to retaliate on those who may have been the cause of their calamities; and that they may be more at liberty in the indulgence of such dispositions, they persuade themselves that it is chiefly with man they have to do, and not with their Maker. Thus is the way prepared to their living without God in the world.

And even where the scriptures are so far understood and revered, as to prevent this exclusion of the Almighty from the operations of his hand, the effect of adversity is often seen in a painful want of confidence as to the assurances of his faithfulness and compassion. This is particularly the case, where men have been led to anticipate an order of events widely different from what has come to pass. The want of sufficient attention to reading, meditation, and prayer, is often apparent in the unauthorized and extravagant expectations of professed Christians. In such cases disappointment, soon or late, is inevitable; and so bitter is it when it comes, that it is almost a matter of course to see the very persons who so far exceeded their brethren in the language of confidence abandoning religion altogether. Events have falsified their strange hopes and boundless dogmatism, covering them with confusion; and because their own idle visions have proved a failure, they learn to regard Christianity as a failure. What began in a selfish

vanity and presumption, ends, as might have been expected, in open impiety. Their religion lasted so long as the dreams of novelty, of individual importance, or of a kind of prosperity lasted; and it began to fail as soon as these were disturbed. There are certain luxurious speculations always abroad, which are to some professors what the loaves and fishes were to others, and to both classes the day of adversity is the season of trial.

But, in the instance of better disposed minds, the effect of adversity, as to the thoughts entertained of God, is often of a kind to be deplored. The reason of the divine conduct in appointing any particular instance of affliction is commonly a secret. The individual may be a sufferer beyond what is usual, and may be at a loss to know why such a lot has been assigned to him. Its necessity in his case is not more obvious than it would be in the case of multitudes who are at ease. Hence there is reason to fear lest he should charge God foolishly, and say, never were sorrows like unto my sorrows: lest he should secretly accuse his Maker of afflicting men willingly, partially, unnecessarily: lest he should look upon his sufferings as indicating the relentless displeasure of his judge, and should learn to despair of mercy: lest he should be tempted to harden his heart, like Ahaz, more and more; and should at length open his ear to those who may dare to say, *Curse God and die!*

III. But it is our privilege to know that divine grace can support the believer under all possible suffering, and even make his adversities blessings. This is done, in part, by reminding him that THE FAVOURITES OF HEAVEN HAVE GENERALLY BEEN THE CHILDREN OF ADVERSITY ; hence the language of the apostle James :—*Take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience.* Hence we find Peter admonishing his suffering brethren to guard against supposing that *some strange thing had happened to them*, assuring them that even their *fiery trial* included nothing more than was *common to man*. In the apostles we see the ambassadors of the Great King—yet what was their life? *Bonds and imprisonments* every where awaited them; sufferings that cannot be enumerated, and death in every form of terror, were before them. Consider that cup of which the apostle to the Gentiles had to drink. *Are they ministers of Christ? I am more ; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in*

fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

From these examples, it must follow that no depth of adversity can warrant suspicion as to the religion of the sufferer. We see that afflictions, the most complicated and continuous, may belong to the lot of the righteous, even of the most righteous. Such as are appointed to us, therefore, can be no other than *are accomplished in our brethren who are in the world.* Were we without chastisement, of which the children of God are said to be invariably partakers, there might then be cause to fear: but, with respect to the path of *great tribulation*, we know that this is the course in which those multitudes have laboured who *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* Yes; and where there may seem to be the greatest exemption from adversity, there may be most of those secret griefs which among the variety of our burdens, are perhaps the least easy to be borne. The remembrance of facts like these not only serves to reconcile the believer to his lot, but throws even an air of greatness and sanctity over the paths of affliction. It is seen, that to be a sufferer is to be conformed, in one point at least, to the pattern of the excellent of the earth in every age,—a thought which can never fail to cheer and elevate the spirit of the man of God.

Another consideration especially encouraging to the Christian in his time of trouble is, that no

cloud ever passes over him except from DIVINE APPOINTMENT. When injured by men, his resentment is stayed by a knowledge of the fact that though the wickedness of men is their own, their power against the just could be nothing *if it were not given them from above*. Hence the prayer of David,—*Deliver my soul from the wicked which are thy sword, from men who are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world*. He accordingly speaks of God as the being *who performeth all things for him*. And in that dark day when Shimei cursed him as he went, and heaped the lowest insults upon him, the fallen monarch said to those who would have slain the base-hearted rebel, *Let him alone, and let him curse*, FOR THE LORD HATH BIDDEN HIM. *It may be that the Lord will look on mine afflictions, and will requite me good for his cursing this day*. Thus the violence of the wicked does not always bear the servant of God away with it, but rather tends to call forth the principles and dispositions peculiar to the men whom the Lord has taught.

And that doctrine which was the stay of David's heart, how beautifully is it taught by the compassionate Redeemer. *Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; YET YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FEEDETH THEM. ARE YE NOT MUCH BETTER THAN THEY?*

It is by means of such scriptures as these that

Christians are led to connect the hand of the Omnipresent Ruler with all their affairs, and to view them as parts of an arrangement partaking at once of infinitude and minuteness, and of the same perfectness in the great and the small. In his view, indeed, the distinctions of small and great must be unknown. The world, in comparison with his greatness, is in kindred with the atom. It is no more an act of condescension in him to number the hairs of our head, than to number the stars of heaven;—the one being as near to his infinity as the other. The men who realize this stupendous truth, learn to cast their care upon their God, believing that *he careth for them*. They are aware that the dark day comes not except in obedience to the divine will; and this assurance is often enough to chase away half its gloom. It is this secret of the Lord which enhances every mercy, and lessens the bitterness of every trial, in the experience of those who fear him.

The Christian is sometimes strengthened in adversity by remembering that its darkest day is NOT SO DARK AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN. Should the head ache, the heart may be at ease; or, should the spirit be, in some sense, wounded, the body may not be subject to infirmity. If much that once conduced to a state of prosperity has passed away, there may be much remaining. Or if the things which have made to themselves wings, and forsaken the mourner, should be his all,—his good name may still be left, and the aspect of providence

may still be such as to forbid despair. If some, on whom he had hoped to lean in the hour of need, have failed; others, of whom he thought not, have been raised up to supply their place. Afflictions, which it would have been alarming beyond expression to have foreseen, have been so adjusted as to time and circumstances, and connected, perhaps, with so much unexpected prayerfulness, calmness, tenderness, and resignation, as to make the remembrance of what he has suffered as much a matter of gratitude as of sorrow. There are joys, as well as sorrows, which mourners only know : it is when afflictions abound, that we may expect consolations to abound.

Thus the devout man is admonished that even his worst state might have been still worse. In proof of this he has only to glance at the state of many of his brethren, or on the history of the Saviour who died for him. Truly could He say, *Never were sorrows like unto my sorrows*. In the garden, and upon the cross, it pleased the Father to deal with him according to *our* sins, and to reward him according to *our* iniquities. Strict justice was his, that the richest mercy might be ours.

It must be kept in view, also, that the design of God in our afflictions is always BENEVOLENT. Such events befall us, not because he has pleasure in appointing them, but because they are needful to our improvement. Hence adversity is frequently spoken of as A MEANS OF TRIAL. It was so with Job. The enemy would have solved all the religion

of the patriarch into selfishness ; and declared that the test of moderate suffering would soon make the truth of his charge manifest. The test was applied ; and the sufferer could say, even in his lowest state, *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* Thus is it ever with the suffering Christian ; and hence the instance of Job is adduced as a general example : *Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.* Adversity is a revealer of secrets ; it tears the mask from the hypocrite ; it shows the believer a multitude of imperfections that might otherwise have been unknown ; and, at the same time, convinces him, more deeply than ever, that the principles on which he has been resting his hope, in prospect of the day of evil, are real and invaluable. Hence these become like tried friends, that may be trusted another day. Paul felt all this when he said, *I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.*

From these causes, adversity is often described as a SCHOOL in which the servants of God are taught wisdom. The evil of sin, the vanities of earth, the feebleness and uncertainties of an arm of flesh,—these are all matters of which we may learn something by the hearing of the ear, but it is through the medium of adversity that the eye seeth them. We may discourse about sickness, or poverty, or slander, or bereavements ; but it is

when these things come that we understand them. Then, not a few scriptures which scarcely attracted notice before, become fraught with meaning and power. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest out of thy law.*

Adversity, therefore, as it respects believers, is always designed, more or less, TO PREVENT EVIL. What the Sovereign of the universe did toward Jesus Christ, considered as our Surety, is the whole of what he does in relation to us in the character of a judge:—all that remains is the discipline of parental love. Through the sacrifice of the cross we have ceased to be the children of wrath, and God does not afflict us willingly. We are not to be condemned with the world; and if we suffer *all the day long, and are chastened every morning*, it is that we may be separated from the evils of the world, and raised above it. Adversity interposes to prevent our passing on from lesser sins to greater, and sometimes to secure us against listening at all to the seductions of the way of death. There was an eye which saw the dangers to which Peter was exposed while the apostle saw them not; and that discernment can detect innumerable seeds of evil in our case of which we are unconscious; and the same care, which, in the sovereignty of its doings, was providing for the safety of Peter, beyond what he could have asked or thought, is ever thus employed in behalf of the redeemed.

And it should be treasured up as an important fact, that of all the dispensations of heaven, these

preventive interpositions of its goodness, are generally the most mysterious. The sin of David, in the matter of Uriah, will explain the suffering which followed. But adversity might have been employed to eradicate the first seeds of evil inclination, instead of occurring as the means of correcting it when matured into transgression. In that case, however, the event would probably have been among the many, the reasons of which can only be known hereafter. His severest scrutiny would not, perhaps, have discovered the cause, and the whole might in consequence have been clothed with mystery. Eternity alone will disclose to us how often the occurrences of which we have bitterly complained have been made, in this manner, the means of saving us from greater evils.

regular
Then most, when most irregular they seem.

Where this intervention does not take place, and we fall into sin, the Father whom we serve possesses too much parental affection to allow of our continuing in such a course. His words are, *If my children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes.* And how much is there, even in the least faulty among us, to require the frequent verification of this scripture? How much defectiveness and evil in our conduct? What a mixture of the vain and

earthly in our motives and desires—even in the purest exercises of our mind? With a malady so complicated upon us, is it surprising that the prescriptions of the Great Physician should be frequent, and sometimes far from agreeable? *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not teach thou me; if I have done iniquity I will do so no more.*

It will hardly be needful to observe, that an important part of the design of the Most High in thus trying, and teaching, and improving the character of his people is, that their light may so shine before men that others, seeing it, may be constrained to *glorify their Father who is in heaven.*

It must be remarked, in conclusion, that all these considerations, which minister so much aid to the Christian in his warfare as connected with adversity, derive the whole of their efficiency from the fact, that the grace provided in the gospel in aid of the suffering is ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE. It is grace which has been so proved in the experience of a multitude which no man can number. All our burdens are adjusted by him who alone knows what we can bear. The nature, the extent, and the duration, of our present afflictions,—all are regulated by him who has said, *As thy day is, thy strength shall be. My grace shall be sufficient for thee. My strength shall be perfect in thy weakness.* Our enemies are all his enemies; and our ultimate triumph must, in consequence, be his glory. It is

a fatal error to suppose that adversity will prove a school for heaven, apart from the sufficiencies of that grace which was procured for men by the great sacrifice which has blotted out our transgressions. It is this grace which savingly enlightens; it is this which soothes; it is this alone which gives sanctity to the path of the afflicted.

It is manifest then, that adversity, in some of its modifications, is inevitable; and that its occurrence in many forms, is so far probable, as to be on the very line of certainty. Sickness, poverty, reproach, bereavement, and many a secret sorrow,—to all these we are exposed; under most of these we shall unquestionably suffer. But what shall the issue be? Every thread of our present existence is interwoven, by its consequences, with the future; and what shall that future be? The results of present suffering are all strictly dependent on our present character. If we are Christians, the grace which has made us such, can render whatever is afflictive in our lot on earth conducive to the ultimate perfectness of our Christianity. But if this character be wanting, the element of all good is wanting.

Nothing can be more animating than to anticipate the effects of adversity in the destiny of those over whom it has had its proper influence. The mind, as thus employed, passes from whatever is painful or humiliating in this dreaming world, to whatever is joyous and elevated in the world to

come. Between these there is seen to be all the relation of cause and effect; and the evils endured below, never fail to derive something of greatness, and even of blessedness, from the transcendent nature of the good in which they are meant to terminate, and to which they are tributary. Thus it is not only true, as repeatedly affirmed by the Saviour, that the path of humiliation is the only path to honour; but that the whole discipline connected with the pains and sorrows, the vanities and uncertainties, of our present being, is no other than the divinely allotted path to a state of endless repose, enjoyment, and perfection. We thus learn that the many unwelcome things which now succeed each other so rapidly, are all pregnant with their opposites; while the amount of what is now grievous, is so trivial, when compared with the state of felicity which it is made to subserve, that its very nature seems to undergo a change—*we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.* The ambitious, the worldly, the lover of pleasure, these think lightly of their toils and endurances in proportion as the end proposed is deemed secure. The results toward which the Christian is directing his solitudes are distinguished by an infinite greatness, and are rendered certain by the oath of the Unchangeable;—well may we conclude that his resignation, and his confidence, amid all intervening difficulty, will be great!

But with the ungodly it is not so. In their case the sufferings of this present life have no connexion with the glory to be revealed. The gospel—that link which mercy has provided to unite the one of these to the other—has been wickedly set at nought; and the consequence of this deed, if persisted in, will be more fearful than may now be conceived. With such minds the season of darkness has contributed nothing toward a meetness for the realms of light. The night is far spent, but there is no day at hand: the winter has passed, but no spring-time, no summer succeeds. They have borne the burdens which all have to bear in this vale of mortality, but it has not been that they might find *rest to their souls*. On the contrary, the darkest day they have here known must prove only a faint image of that utter darkness which is reserved as their dwelling-place for ever; the wintry scenes of life, as they now pass, must appear all-attractive if compared with the wasting desolations of the eternity disclosed to them; while the heaviest burden sustained on earth must be as a thing of nought, in comparison with the load of guilt and sorrow that will press without intermission, and without end, on the nature of the lost—the *hopeless*.

CHAP. XV.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —THE FEAR OF DEATH.

Thankless for favours from on high,
Man thinks he fades too soon;
Though 'tis his privilege to die
Would he improve the boon.

COWPER.

WAR always supposes an adversary; and the fear of an adversary, generally bespeaks the weakness of one party, and the strength of another. Death is one of the enemies with whom the Christian, and the whole human race, have to contend; and an enemy to whom all men, soon or late, become captives. Hence it can hardly occasion surprise that this foe should be spoken of as an object of fear. Where there is the faintest prospect of success, there remains some motive to courage, endurance, and effort; but where the event of being numbered with the slain is inevitable, the heart generally sickens, and resistance is abandoned. Nevertheless, though there be no discharge in this warfare, and though it be one in which the unbeliever can have no hope, our con-

dition is not desperate. There is a deliverer, who proclaims himself as *the resurrection and the life* ; and there are means by which those who make Him their defence, may triumph over death, and, like him, may conquer, though they *seem* to be vanquished. His design in assuming our nature, and appearing on our earth, is expressly said to have been, *that he might deliver those, who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

In reference to the Fear of Death, there are two points which deserve our devout consideration :—these are,—its Source, and its Remedy.

I. One obvious source of the Fear of Death will be seen, in THE NATURE OF THE CAUSES IMMEDIATELY PRODUCING IT. Pain and sorrow are evils to which we are constantly exposed, and from which we are ever shrinking. To escape from the one or the other is the great business of life. When approaching us, even in their most subdued forms, we do much to avoid them. How anxious, then, must our thoughts be, how agitated our emotions, when meeting them in their most formidable array! All that men endure, and still live, will generally appear trivial, in comparison with that which proves too heavy to be borne, and they sink under it. There are, doubtless, instances in which persons suffer less in dying than at many previous intervals during life. But we are slow to conclude that such occurrences are frequent. We think of

CHAP. XV.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE, AS CONNECTED WITH —THE FEAR OF DEATH.

Thankless for favours from on high,
Man thinks he fades too soon;
Though 'tis his privilege to die,
Would he improve the boon.

COWPER.

WAR always supposes an adversary; and the fear of an adversary, generally bespeaks the weakness of one party, and the strength of another. Death is one of the enemies with whom the Christian, and the whole human race, have to contend; and an enemy to whom all men, soon or late, become captives. Hence it can hardly occasion surprise that this foe should be spoken of as an object of fear. Where there is the faintest prospect of success, there remains some motive to courage, endurance, and effort; but where the event of being numbered with the slain is inevitable, the heart generally sickens, and resistance is abandoned. Nevertheless, though there be no discharge in this warfare, and though it be one in which the unbeliever can have no hope, our con-

dition is not desperate. There is a deliverer, who proclaims himself as *the resurrection and the life* ; and there are means by which those who make Him their defence, may triumph over death, and, like him, may conquer, though they *seem* to be vanquished. His design in assuming our nature, and appearing on our earth, is expressly said to have been, *that he might deliver those, who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

In reference to the Fear of Death, there are two points which deserve our devout consideration :—these are,—its Source, and its Remedy.

I. One obvious source of the Fear of Death will be seen, in THE NATURE OF THE CAUSES IMMEDIATELY PRODUCING IT. Pain and sorrow are evils to which we are constantly exposed, and from which we are ever shrinking. To escape from the one or the other is the great business of life. When approaching us, even in their most subdued forms, we do much to avoid them. How anxious, then, must our thoughts be, how agitated our emotions, when meeting them in their most formidable array! All that men endure, and still live, will generally appear trivial, in comparison with that which proves too heavy to be borne, and they sink under it. There are, doubtless, instances in which persons suffer less in dying than at many previous intervals during life. But we are slow to conclude that such occurrences are frequent. We think of

the lingering sickness, the wasting strength, the progress of disease, the aching bones, the sunken eye, the livid flesh, and the convulsive throes,—adding to all this, the enfeebled mind, and the nameless strugglings of sorrow, and remorse, and fear, which so often accompany the spirits of men in their great transit from this place of probation to the place of their destiny. Who can have seen these painful and humiliating causes at work, and not have been constrained to ask—And where shall *my* death-chamber be found? After what manner will *my* poor exit be appointed? How shall *I* meet the swellings of Jordan? Indeed, the only effect of a thoughtful reference to the causes of this event, if considered in themselves, must be to create that abject dismay which the Apostle has described by the term “bondage.” They are none of them joyous, but grievous, and, taken together, they constitute the extreme of natural evil; nor is it a few who feel the vassalage which they are so powerful to impose.

The fear of death may be attributed, in part, to THE PAINFUL SEPARATIONS EFFECTED BY IT. When the soul of the rich man in the parable passed from its pampered abode to the world of spiritual natures, it was soon ascertained that *his* good things had all been received during his earthly life. To be removed from the earth was, in his case, to be removed from the place where his treasure and his heart had long been. It is with the ambitious, and the covetous, as with the

voluptuary:—they give their whole heart to present things, and, say what they may, with their whole heart, they must fear being torn away from them. If what they love most be on the earth, what they fear most must be the stroke which separates for ever between them and the earth. If there be any show of reconciliation in regard to such an event, it can only have proceeded from the heathen principle, that there is a dignity in submitting with calmness to what is inevitable:—like Cæsar, such men would gather their mantle round them, and appear the hero to the last.

But they are not merely selfish interests, or forbidden attachments, from which we are separated by death. There are connexions and pursuits which have much in them that is amiable, and generous, and even devout, from which men are severed by their dissolution. The husband would fain live to protect the partner of his present sojourn from the rude assaults of an evil world. The parent would not leave his children orphans in a region where the law of kindness is so imperfectly remembered. The friend would not be taken from his friend. Nor would the man, whose mind is filled with plans of self-improvement, and of future usefulness, be suddenly called away, and see all these pleasing visions change *as a dream when one awaketh*. Many ties like these, in addition to the lower earthliness of mankind, occur to make us frequently solicitous that our dying day may be a distant one.

Another source of fear adverted to, is observable in THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH WITH REGARD TO THE BODY. It is not easy to describe the feeling with which we visit that scene alone, where we have enjoyed the intercourse of those whom we shall never so meet again. We gaze on the inanimate objects that remain; and, in our thirst after some relieving sympathy, we endow them with a kind of consciousness. We call to mind who we there met, the things they said, and what they did;—the well-constructed plans of one, the lightheartedness or buoyant hopes of another, and the multitude of anticipations, known to have been indulged by the rest. And where are they now? Alas, for human life! Some of the gayest, and some who bid fair to live long, and to accomplish much, have gone to the grave. Others, missing the good they were confident of obtaining, have sunk beneath a succession of evils little expected;—all, all, are now so scattered as never to meet on earth again! The heart which has not bled in its sadness, amid the scenes which call forth such remembrances, must be of stone, and not of flesh.

Still there is no deserted dwelling whose solitude or silence can bring such affecting recollections along with them as are called up while we gaze on a once-beloved house of clay from which the spirit has departed. The coldness, the silence, the insensibility of death, are all its own! The earthly tabernacle has lost its glory. While life continued, the eye retained its language, the ear received the

sounds addressed to it, the tongue gave utterance to thought and sympathy, and the pulsation, and warmth, and movement, of the whole frame, rendered the body an agreeable, and, perhaps, an intensely interesting object. But how changed when death comes! Remember what you may of the past, it is that which returns no more. The eye will no more tell of the animation within, the ear will no more vibrate to the music of the sweetest sounds, and the tongue has uttered its last good or evil. Moreover, there is a thought which can deepen the feeling of dismay with which we thus look on the dead, so as to make it nothing short of an emotion of terror; it is, that, even yet, the worst is not come, the grave having its darkness and loneliness to bring, and the worm its work to do there! In that gloomy house we reach the lowest state of degradation to which the body may descend, and from that state there is no exemption. All the distinctions and flatteries that may be heaped upon mortals, can only serve to clothe this process of unsparing humiliation with increased hatefulness and terror. The victims of deep wretchedness may sometimes covet a return to their dust, and may find a poor relief in speaking of the grave as a house *where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest*. But what can teach the gay, the prosperous, and the mighty, to say of corruption, *Thou art my father*, and of the worm, *thou art my mother and sister*! There is nothing either within us or around us

that may enable us so to do. No man may thus conquer the strong instincts of his nature, except it be given him from above. There is no true victory over these present evils, apart from the faith of future good.

Much of the fear with which death is regarded is sometimes the effect of THE POSSIBLE, OR PROBABLE CHARACTER OF THE SCENES BEYOND IT. We do not now refer to what is taught on this subject in the scriptures; but rather to the conjectures in relation to it, that have been supplied by the imagination or the reason of mankind. It is a large portion of the human race who have been left almost entirely to these incompetent guides; and even those who possess the certainties of divine revelation, are often as much influenced on this subject by the variableness of their own feelings and inferences. Where the mind is subject to such control, there is much in the manner of our removal from the world to beget alarming thoughts as to the future. Admitting that there are reasons which make it proper that men should be taken from the earth, after passing a brief space upon it, we do not see the need of making the manner of their dismissal so humiliating and painful, unless it be to tell them of their sinfulness. And why remind them of this fact in such awful terms, just as they are leaving a state of trial, and about to appear in the place of judgment? Does not this seem to anticipate a fearful issue—to forebode tribulation and wrath? For if it be a fact that the Being, to whom we

owe every thing, whom we have deeply offended, and who can dispose of us as it may please him, shall speak to us, through his actions, in terms of strong displeasure down even to the closing moments of our connexion with this world, may we not well fear lest the next state should be by no means exempt from the expressions of his anger? The gospel may assist us in conceiving of a transition so wonderful as that of a spirit passing at once from a tortured and polluted body into a state from which every trace of evil is for ever excluded. But nature could never have taught us this; and, in proportion as we allow its obscurities and tremblings to perplex and enfeeble our faith, we become involved in much gloomy apprehension. The future, in such cases, is seen gathering its complexion from the present, and we shrink from the thought of entering on a state, the passage to which possesses so much to affect our fears rather than our hopes.

We must not omit to remark, that there is SOMETHING IN THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE, WITH REGARD TO DEATH, that may well assist to render its approach alarming. Men often speak of death as a debt of nature, regarding it as an act in which we meet certain claims upon us, and intimating, that, having so done, enough is done. Death is thus viewed, not simply as a penalty, but as a penalty having in it the virtue of an atonement. In other instances, it is noticed as being merely a part of a parental discipline to which the human family is

subject, the end of which, at the general resurrection, will be abundantly benevolent, and unspeakably glorious. Thus death is numbered among the ultimate benefits of heaven to mankind. But the doctrine which teaches that our submission to death partakes in the least of the nature of an atonement is altogether unscriptural; and the men who regard our mortality merely as an act of parental chastisement, have formed their conclusion from a very partial view of facts, and, as in all such cases, have exposed themselves to the influence of material error. There are many portions of the word of God which speak a more comprehensive, and, in some important respects, a very different language on this subject. Death is declared expressly to be the *wages of sin*. It does not come upon the innocent as the means of preserving their innocence, but upon the guilty, as a part of their punishment. It is not a dispensation to prevent sin, so much as to mark its existence and its evil. Hence *the last ENEMY to be destroyed is death*. The scriptures distinctly teach that death is a part of the curse which sin has brought upon us, and that this curse must prove overwhelming, both here and hereafter, unless means be discovered, foreign from ourselves, that may lead to the remission of our sins. It is manifestly a feature of the divine economy, which bespeaks the intervention of the judge more than of the parent; and if it ever become a benefit, it must be by means of some superadded arrangement introduced for the purpose. In itself,

it speaks not of love or mercy, but altogether of judgment, and of that to the uttermost. And wherever death is anticipated, under a stronger perception of what the scriptures teach, with regard to its cause, than of what is taught in reference to the means of overcoming it, a spirit of fearfulness and bondage must ensue. Thus the light in which death is described in the scriptures is such as to extinguish all hope, except as founded on His mediation, who, *through death, destroyed him that had the power of death.*

Finally, there is THE DECISIVE INFLUENCE OF DEATH IN REGARD TO THE FUTURE STATE OF THE SOUL, which can hardly fail to augment the fear with which men anticipate their removal from the world. *There is no work or device in the grave, whither thou goest. As the tree falls, so it must lie. The night cometh when no man can work.* In the affairs of life, there are sometimes occasions when we have to choose between two paths, and when the consequences of committing ourselves to the one or the other are conceived to be so great, that we become subject to a painful degree of timidity and apprehension. We see, perhaps, that the disasters of a foolish choice may be multiplied and irretrievable; and we consider, and reconsider, and almost tremble once and again, before we venture the step on which so much may prove to have been depending. Such moments are the hinges of human life;—the points from which the large masses of our history derive their hue and character.

But, should the consequences resulting from any such choice be of the utmost importance that can attach to earthly things, how little important must even these be if compared with those depending on the character with which we die! If we hesitate, and fear, because on the point of selecting between affluence or want, celebrity or contempt, how much more may we so do when the issue of the hour which is at hand, must be an eternity of the greatest good, or the greatest evil! As the thoughts proper to such a crisis crowd upon us, we remember him who said—*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* It is the language of the heart which we then utter, as we exclaim, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*

What we have now said, of course, supposes that there may be room to doubt whether we partake of that character or not, with which it would be safe to die. There are matters on which we can decide without a moment's hesitancy, or the least fear of error,—as that we witness the changes of day and night, or that we distinguish between one countenance and another. But the question, as to our being, indeed, Christians, as to whether our opinions be assuredly true, or our feelings assuredly devout, is of a different nature. This is an inquiry relating to the secret and complicated movements of a heart *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* The steps by which men reject the truth are often so gradual, and so shrewdly disguised,

as to allow, at length, of their placing the utmost confidence in error ; and, with regard to matters of feeling, there are so many sources of deception connected with them, that it must often be not a little difficult to decide upon their character. Men may approach so nearly to the kingdom of God without entering it ; natural character, under favourable circumstances, may bear so strong a resemblance to spiritual character ; and the subtle forms which our selfishness may assume, even in connexion with religious duties, are so manifold, and so hard of detection, that, generally speaking, the man who fears nothing on his own account, may well be an object of the utmost solicitude with those who are concerned for his spiritual safety. So great is the mixture of good and evil, even in the case of the most devout, that the man who has laboured most to arrive at certainty as to the state before him, will rarely be without his moments of misgiving. Hence, to the end, the exhortation follows us—*giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure*. And even Paul speaks of his strivings, lest he should become a wreck, or a *cast-away*. The man who knows nothing of such fear may be a Christian in his most agreeable state of feeling, or he may be of that class of professors who fail to distinguish between hope and presumption.

Such are some of the most obvious causes of the Fear of Death. The dying strife, the ties which are burst asunder by dissolution, its consequences

in relation to the body, the foreboding shadows which it seems to throw on the path beyond it, the doctrine of scripture as to its true source and intention, and its momentous influence as the stroke which fixes our lot in weal or woe for ever—all concur to render this event the most solemn of all solemn occurrences. But is there no balm in Gilead,—no physician there? The answer supplied by the Son of God is—*He that believeth on me shall never die.* Admitting that such language is not to be interpreted literally, it is obvious that there is a largeness of meaning in it which it behoves us well to consider.

THE REMEDY FOR THE FEAR OF DEATH.

II. In noticing the Remedy thus provided against the fear of death, it should be granted that there are men who contrive to subdue their timidity on this subject without the aid of the gospel, or who at least appear to do so. *There is no fear of God before their eyes;* and, as a consequence, they not only sin against him without dismay, but frequently *have no bands in their death.* This alarming fact may be the result of various causes. In the common affairs of life, there is a confidence which is the effect of a mere insensibility to danger, but which is not unfrequently applauded as courage. And thus it is in regard to the feeling of calmness or indifference with which death is sometimes encountered by those who have every thing to fear from it. Added, in such instances, to the distracting or stupefying effects of disease, is that blindness

to spiritual realities, which, as the result of growing depravity, is sometimes perceived to have been thickening throughout a long life. It is not expected that men will tremble on a precipice which they do not see;—nor are we surprised that the slumbering man should slumber on, though the arm of the destroyer be upraised and about to strike! It has often been matter of perplexity, that Christians, with all their advantages, should sometimes meet death with much less apparent fortitude than their irreligious neighbours. The facts we have now adverted to are sufficient to explain this difficulty. Between these parties there is frequently all that distinguishes between the seeing and the blind.

It must be recollected, then, that the scriptures speak of men whom the god of this world has blinded; and that they describe the worldly-minded, while engaged in all the activities of present being, as sleeping the sleep of death. We know, also, that there is a wilful, a long-continued resistance of the truth, which may provoke the Almighty to *send upon such men a strong delusion, that they may believe a lie.* In such cases, the work of judgment begins before the season of probation has closed; and that freedom from terror in the article of dissolution, which may seem so inexplicable to the young Christians, occurs as a part of the curse which is to wither and destroy them!

It is one thing, moreover, to submit to dissolution

as to what may not be avoided, and another to regard it as part of a plan, the effect of which will be to exhibit the parental character of its author. But it is evident that this philosophical obedience to necessity, and this christian resignation, widely different as they are in their nature, are not unfrequently confounded. That there should be reasonings, foreign from the authority of scripture, capable of supporting certain minds in prospect of death, as in the case of David Hume, is by no means surprising. But it is a fact, no less notorious, and not less important to be remembered, that the instances in which the deistical philosophy has miserably failed, are much more numerous than those in which it has seemed to possess efficiency. Judging from the industry with which infidels have laboured to prevent the dying terrors of certain among their leaders from becoming known, or to bring them into discredit when known, there is room to believe that the fear of death, as affecting unbelievers at such seasons, is a tale the half of which has not been told us. The worldly would generally persuade themselves that their companions in worldliness die peacefully, and, in consequence, safely. The reason of this is manifest:—as they partake themselves of the character of the worldly, they would have the approach of the last enemy, in such cases, to be of a kind that may leave the anticipation of it in their own case as little painful as possible. In the same manner, those who have taken their place with the infidel

are under the strongest inducement to magnify the efficacy of the creed, or rather of the no-creed, of every such character.

It is not that freedom from apprehension which may result from any, or from the whole of these causes, that the Christian is concerned to possess in his last moments, or in his more solemn anticipations of them. There are many considerations which enable the Christian to account for such instances of apparent tranquillity in the most awful circumstances. Should the end of the wicked man be peaceful, he is not allowed to be surprised at it; but is constrained to regard it as a peace resembling that ominous calm in nature, by which the most desolating convulsions are generally preceded. The remedy against the fear of death, in which the Christian confides, is derived from other, and far different sources; to a few of which we must now advert.

The Christian is assured that sin, from which death has derived existence, and all its power, is CANCELLED, IN REGARD TO ALL WHO HAVE BEEN TAUGHT TO PLACE THEIR TRUST IN THE SACRIFICE PRESENTED BY JESUS CHRIST. Hence the language of the Apostle:—*The sting of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law; thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* The original sentence was—*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* On that day the soul forfeited its proper life; and the body received the seeds of its mortality. But the sacred writers

direct our attention to a second Adam; and affirm, that, as in the first Adam, *all die*, so there is a sense in which, by means of the second Adam, *all shall be made alive*. This is, to such an extent, the fact, that no portion of the human race will be found to perish purely on account of original sin. Through the mediation of the Saviour, this doom is reserved to those who, by their own iniquities, proclaim themselves the enemies of God. But the Christian is one of a multitude who are described as *a peculiar people*, and who are placed in a peculiar relation with regard to their Maker, and death, and futurity. The terrors of death are derived chiefly from its being viewed as the punishment of sin, and as the omen of everlasting condemnation. Here is its sting. But, through the Redeemer's sacrifice, death becomes to the Christian as one in a various catalogue of things which must work together for his good.

So complete, indeed, is the atonement which has been made for human guilt, that the Father might cause our spirits to be enlightened and sanctified at once, and our bodies to pass at once into heaven, without tasting of death, were such his pleasure. But the wisdom which has determined that our victory over spiritual death should be by means of a various and protracted warfare, has arranged that victory over natural death should be through the passage of the grave. Thus a new character attaches to this event, when viewed in connexion with the second Adam, instead of being regarded

merely in its relation to the first. From the one, this enemy derives all that power which has rendered him the king of terrors; by the other, the foe has been deprived of his main strength, and rendered comparatively and ultimately harmless.

Hence the Christian is taught to regard THE SEPARATIONS OCCASIONED BY DEATH AS PARTS OF A GREAT PLAN, THE ISSUES OF WHICH WILL BE ALTOGETHER BENEVOLENT. These separations, we have seen, are many, various in their character, and often painful beyond expression; and it is impossible that we should be satisfied as to the benevolence of their design, unless assured that all their evil will be indeed surpassed by the good to which they lead. The pains of the process must be exceeded by the pleasures of the result. What, then, has religion to place in the balance against separation from the intimate connexions, the endeared possessions, and the much-loved pursuits of the present world? We answer, enough, and greatly more than enough, to turn the scale in its favour. Its design is to prepare believers for a better fellowship, a richer heritage, and more exalted pursuits than can be realized on earth. If the servant of God be taken from the less, it is that he may enter upon the possession of the greater. He has to experience a dissolution of the most tender ties connected with present existence, but it is that he may ascend to the more felicitous relationships of the heavenly world. If taken from much on earth, it is that he may receive to himself

a kingdom which cannot be moved. He has to relinquish pursuits, which may have served to beguile his saddest hours, and have ministered not a little of innocent and sincere delight; but it is that his sympathies may be given more entirely to others, the pleasures of which exceed whatever the mind may now conceive. This is the end of his vocation, and the believer would not live for ever at the cost of being for ever estranged from it. Hence the desire of the Apostle *to depart and to be with Christ*. Hence his exultation—*I count not the sufferings of this present life as worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!*

Believers are often strengthened in contending against the fear of death, by learning to view submission to it as AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE, HAVING RESPECT BOTH TO GOD AND MAN. *Shall we receive good at the Lord's hand, and shall we not receive evil?* If we bless him as having set his glorious kingdom before us, shall we rebel against him because of the way which leads to it? Is it not enough that he has called us to an eternity of greatness and happiness while deserving to perish; but must we murmur because time also is not free from the painful and the humiliating? Has he saved us from spiritual death, and shall we deem it a severity that we must submit to natural death? Has he rescued us from the sleepless horrors of the lost,

and shall we charge him foolishly because of the brief repose allotted us in the tomb? Did he deliver his beloved Son to die the death of the cross, that *he* might thus testify the evil of sin; even while removing it; and shall *we* hesitate to go down to the grave, if thereby we may do homage to our great Benefactor, and testify to the same truth?

Among the most obvious of our religious duties is the effort to bring our rebellious nature into willing subjection to the great law of mortality. The astonishment is not that our entrance into heaven must be preceded by a life of conflict, and a death so humbling and painful, but rather that there should be any process, however great its debasement or suffering, that may lead to a result so truly wonderful. The nature which has permitted the afflictions of life, has permitted the reign of death, and both for the same reason,—that Christians, by meeting them in the spirit enjoined upon them, *may glorify their Father who is in heaven.*

Nor is this an act of obedience having respect to God only. The relation in which we are placed to each other is such as to make it incumbent upon us to guard against all desire of exemption from this general law. If it be so, that *as face answereth to face in a glass, so doth the heart of man to man*, it would seem to follow, that if affliction, or death, be made to have their place in the lot of any, they should belong to the lot of all. And who could

really wish to be an exception—especially in the latter respect? Every such wish must be a violation of that law which says, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. It must proceed from that inordinate selfishness which the great law of equity condemns. The greatest men, and the best, have alike submitted to the stroke which separates us from the earth; leaving no plea to be urged in behalf of our own respite or acquittal, which might not have been better urged in the case of others. The precept which requires us to prefer one another in honour, prohibits the faintest wish to escape from those dishonours of the tomb to which all flesh has been doomed. In this manner, those fraternal sympathies which should bind man to his nature *wherever* found, and which the spirit of filial submission to the divine will must ever strengthen, all assist in reconciling the mind to an event in itself so grievous and unwelcome.

The Christian is also much encouraged in his warfare against the fear of death by the fact, THAT SUFFICIENT GRACE HAS BEEN VOUCHSAFED TO HIS BRETHREN WHEN CALLED TO DIE. Not a few who have feared death all their life long, have been raised wholly above such fears when their hour has arrived. Some may be harassed by their doubtings even to the last. Some, while not altogether free from the occasional shadows of uncertainty, are, upon the whole, greatly sustained and comforted,—they are enabled to resign their

spirits calmly, gratefully, into the hands of the Lord God of truth. Others anticipate their approaching rest with such delightful confidence, with so deep a foretaste of future blessedness, with so strong a perception of the glory and the beauty of the land before them, that the living might well covet to be in the place of the dying. Death, to them, is often

like a shadow thrown
Softly and lightly from a passing cloud.

We say not that those Christians who have possessed most of this feeling of triumph in death, must have been the best Christians: there is frequently a sovereignty in these varieties; they are, at all times, the work of him who *divideth unto every man severally as he will*. But it is no small encouragement to know, that the Being who alone *can* make death easy, often does so; not unfrequently teaching the soul, in that solemn season, to put away the last fragments of its vain hope, to search after the Rock with renewed effort, and, feeling its stay beneath, to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. In some instances, there is granted to the mind of the most uninstructed, a largeness of thought, and a power and beauty of expression, which seem as though whispered in the ear by those ministering natures who convey their aids to suffering saints, as they did to Jesus in the garden, and watch for the departing spirit, that, as in the case of Lazarus, they may bear it to the

skies. *The wicked are driven away in their wickedness ; the righteous hath hope in his death.*

And who can determine how far THE INTERESTS OF DIVINE TRUTH HAVE BEEN ADVANCED BY THE MANNER IN WHICH IT HAS ENABLED CHRISTIANS TO DIE ? This is not the least among the considerations serving to reconcile us to our being numbered with the dead. Many who have long slighted the voice of wisdom and affection have been constrained to listen to it when proceeding from a dying pillow. Nothing new, perhaps, has been said ; but it has been said with a tenderness, with so manifest a sincerity, and in connexion with so many touching circumstances, that the heart, which seemed as though it never would relent, has begun to melt ; and the tear, and the prayer, and the new life, and heaven itself,—all have followed ! Thus the death of the faithful has been often made the life of the impenitent ; much as the blood of the martyrs has proved the seed of the church. So plain is it, that the All-wise can render the worst evils that may befall us conducive to the greatest good !

But whatever be the manner in which Christians sometimes die, in the experience of all such it will soon be realized, THAT BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD. Should darkness encircle them, and should it continue to the end, even yet it must be well. In such a case, the transition to the regions of light may be more sudden, but cannot be less certain. Such darkness may occur as the chastisement of former iniquity ; or, in the mysteries

of the divine sovereignty, it may be connected with some constitutional infirmity. But in heaven chastisements must be for ever unknown; and the only exercise of sovereignty there is to bestow its fulness of blessing on a perfected people. And as to this *earthly house*, the body, we know that it is taken down that it may be rebuilt after a nobler model. It is that, when raised again, it may be *fashioned like unto his glorious body* before whom the hosts of heaven worship. Who would not die, willingly die, while his faith can look onwards to a change so marvellous—*this corruption putting on incorruption, this mortal putting on immortality, and death swallowed up of life!*

Nor can the believer forget, that while the brief night of the tomb shall last, it is not the soul, not the seat of consciousness, that is there. It is the mere vestment of man's superior nature that is thus for a season disposed of; the garment of mortality being thrown off, that it may be re-produced, in a state more suited to the rank of spiritual natures raised to officiate as kings and priests before God for ever. Thus the grave shall be to the body, what the world has been to the soul—the place of its regeneration; and when both shall have performed their part, and God shall have accomplished the number of his elect, then cometh the end—death shall be trodden under foot of victory, and the world shall be no more.

CHAP. XVI.

CONCLUSION.—THE CLAIMS OF THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

Ask him, indeed, what trophies he has raised,
Or what achievements of immortal fame
He purposes, and he will answer—None ;
His warfare is within.—————

COWPER.

It has appeared in a preceding chapter, that the works of God have all their respective offices assigned them, and that in proportion to their endowments is the law of activity under which they are placed. Those natures by which most may be done, are the natures from which most is exacted. With the holy, throughout the universe, duty is a habit, and its name is only another word for happiness. And even in the case of the unholy, the quarrel with their Maker is not so much as to the quantity of what is demanded, as about its quality. That they should be employed, results, of necessity, from the constitution of their being : but they would have their employments to be a matter determined by their own inclinations, not by the divine will ; and directed to ends of their own

choosing, not to the divine glory. In one of these two paths the good or evil are every where progressing; and if they meet with impediments, war is inevitable,—they must strive to overcome them. This must be the effect even with the most holy, if obstructed in their course of obedience by the intervention of influences opposed to it. Hence we read of war in heaven, between Michael and his angels, and the Dragon and his angels. Thus sin imposes the necessity of resistance even on the sinless; and places every nature possessed by it in a state of contention with itself, and with surrounding natures.

Sin must ever be opposed to created happiness as much as to the divine honour. It must exist, therefore, in the case of every sinner, as the effect of a triumph obtained over the reason, and the proper dispositions, of the soul. Were this triumph so complete as to put an end to the moral discernment, and the better affections, the reign,—or rather the anarchy, of the evil passions would be undisturbed. But there is no nature so fallen as to have reached such a state. Even where the feelings which relate to things as good or evil have been most impaired or perverted, the sense of right and wrong in the understanding has retained something of its consciousness; and the effect of this portion of light, as opposed to the depraved propensities, has been a state of conflict. Self-reproach, to whatever partial oblivion it may seem for a while to be subject, is a worm that can

only die when sin shall die. And wherever the properties of an individual nature are in this state of encroachment and contention among themselves, there is the state of things which must lead to encroachment and contention in regard to other natures. Milton, indeed, speaks of the fallen angels as living in a state of concord on the ground of their common enmity against God and goodness. But from the working of such enmities, as observed among ourselves, we may be permitted to doubt whether there be not more of poetical fiction than of sober truth in this description. It is certain, that, among us, the effects of our common apostasy have not been of this character. All the manifestations of selfishness on the part of men toward each other, are so many indications of that war between man and man which the sin common to men has called into existence. And when we pass from the little occasions of private feud, to see the same passions developed in civil convulsions, and national contests, we have to look on thrones demolished, empires dissolved, and whole continents stained with blood! So little do creatures gain when they affect to be a law unto themselves, instead of bowing to the laws of the Creator. *Whence spring wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even from your lusts?*

From all these considerations, it must cease to be a matter of surprise that the language of scripture should be strongly imbued with a martial

phraseology. It has to do with all that warfare of the inner man out of which every external conflict has its origin. That we should all be, in one sense, soldiers, is, from the present condition of our nature, unavoidable. We must serve God or mammon, the Creator or the destroyer. We must *endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ*, or submit to a heavier discipline, and be exposed to greater perils, under command of the adversary. Labour we must, and contend we must, our only choice being whether it shall be *for* God, or *against* him; whether in a good fight, or an evil one; whether to *lay hold on eternal life*, or to *sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind*.

Our special concern in this chapter is, that, under the divine blessing, we may induce such as have hitherto made the worse choice to make the better one. And in the Christian warfare there are four things which, taken together, must leave those who refuse to enlist themselves in this noble enterprise without excuse, in the day when God shall judge the hearts of men by Jesus Christ. It is observable that this contest is approved, to a certain extent, even by the Maxims of the World; and that along with this fact there is the Sense of Duty, the Excellence of the Objects pursued, and the moral Certainty of Obtaining them,—all concurring to render our being parties to this service both reasonable and delightful.

I. In speaking of the Christian warfare as being

in any measure sanctioned by the maxims of the world, it is obvious that we venture a remark which will require some explanation. All that we here intend is, that the better portion of mankind, throughout the civilized world, have agreed in the approval of much that the gospel enjoins—such as the importance of forming the character in habits of temperance, integrity, and benevolence; and the duty of recognizing some kind of religious obligation. All lessons of this nature, coming from persons who are little, if at all, influenced by the authority of scripture, may be regarded in the light of concessions from opponents; and, as such, may be said to lend an additional force to those precepts of inspiration which relate to the same duties. We are fully aware that the majority of mankind cannot be said to have been very studious in the practice of the virtues just enumerated. But there have always been those who, without being Christians, have not been altogether negligent as to the possession of such dispositions; and they have concurred in strongly urging the cultivation of them. Many also, who, for a while, have laughed at such obligations, have lived to confess that these things, if not the matters of a special revelation, are things so connected with consequences in the system of nature and providence, that the man who learns to be most observant of them is the man affording the most lucid proof of wisdom.

There cannot, accordingly, be any fair objection

to the gospel, on the ground of its affirming that no unjust man, no intemperate man, no impure person,—in other words, that neither thieves, nor drunkards, nor fornicators, dying in such a state, shall have any part in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Men who have failed to embrace the peculiar doctrines of the New Testament, have often admitted the beauty and force of its instructions with regard to *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*. Even the avowed unbeliever, while manifesting the bitterest enmity against what he is pleased to call the mysteries of the gospel, has sometimes lavished his praise on the purity and comprehensiveness of its morality. It follows, then, that to be occupied in *keeping under the body, and bringing it into subjection*; in labouring that every thing opposed to sobriety, purity, justice, or benevolence, may be subdued and destroyed; and that the state of mind favourable to these virtues may acquire the firmness and maturity of habit, is to be engaged in the most laudable efforts, our enemies themselves being judges.

Nor must we omit to notice that acknowledgment of an obligation, as to some kind of religious worship, which is so observable in the conduct of the human race. Every nation has its objects of worship; its forms, and times, and places, to which its notions of sanctity are attached. And that multitude among ourselves, whose Christianity, being the mere effect of education, leaves them still men of the world, are constrained to bear an

indirect testimony to a better piety than their own, by our observance of its forms. The devout believer, then, may have his sabbath, his place for worship, and his religious exercises, and in all this there is nothing to which any man may take exception who does not mean to claim a higher wisdom than that of his species, and who is not prepared, as the fitting consequence of so modest a pretension, to rush into the excesses of atheism.

But this is not the whole of that field in which the Christian has to appear and to do battle. To all those moral actions, and moral feelings, that may have obtained a good report among men, he has to add much that is peculiar to the gospel; and he has to connect with what the worldly may approve, and with what they may despise, a sanctity of motive which they will assuredly fail to understand. The self-denial imposed on him may be severe as the loss of a right arm, or a right eye—but still he must submit to it; and the evil which he is required to overcome with good, may be of a painful amount,—still the command that he should so overcome it follows him. And in all such exercises he is to be sustained, not by a proud sense of rectitude, nor by the hope of human favour, but by a grateful homage in regard to his authority who has redeemed us with his own blood that we might thus honour him. So that the believer may be heard to say, This I do, not because it is what the world has in part approved, nor mainly because it has commended itself to my own sense of justice and

propriety, but rather because it is in this way that I am to manifest myself a Christian, and to do what I may for the glory of Christ.

And that redemption which, in this manner, gives existence to a morality in a great degree its own, and to motives in a greater measure its own, confers on the believer a religious creed, and produces within him a religious feeling, which are still more peculiar. The leading doctrines of the gospel are such as it would never have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had they not been revealed to us; and the gratitude which we feel to be due for the mercies thus disclosed is incompatible with mere formality. When believers learn to rest on the atonement, and possess the hope of everlasting life, they partake of a peace and joy which must raise them much above the mere outward observances of religion, causing them to enter into its spirit and design. And the promises of grace to enlighten, and renovate, and comfort the spirit, and to render every external event conducive to their present improvement and eternal greatness, are all of a nature to call forth the deepest veneration of the understanding, and the strongest emotions of the heart. With such men religion is not one of the appendages, or mere decencies of life, but its master element—a habit of thought and feeling possessing a controul over all other thoughts and all other feelings. It was thus with him who exclaimed, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I*

desire beside thee ! My heart and my flesh crieth out for God, for the living God ; when shall I come and appear before God ? In this spirit did Paul write to the Philippians, especially when he said, Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

Now, if it be certain that the immoral man will rarely become a reformed man, except as the result of much watchfulness and effort, it surely would be idle to suppose that our earthly nature can ever become thus heavenly in its aspirations, without a determined conflict maintained with a view to such a change. Hence the point deserving the closest possible attention, on the part of every unconverted man, is, whether he has any sufficient reason to assign for not being engaged in this enterprize.

II. Hence we now proceed to shew that the conflict thus far sanctioned by the better judgment and feeling of the world itself, is one which we should be found prosecuting from a Sense of Duty.

This sense of duty must arise from a perception of the relations in which we are placed with regard to other beings ; and is, of course, materially affected by the good or the evil we may have received from them. Where we see the largest amount of natural excellence, if it be accompanied with an equal degree of sanctity, there we owe the largest measure of veneration and attachment, especially if this combination of natural and moral

greatness shall have been employed with a view to our welfare. And what does the Christian warfare demand, beyond a practical regard to these obvious and acknowledged obligations? It insists simply, that we seek to regain this true state of obedience in reference to the Creator and the creature—that we labour to render unto each according to the claims of each. It consists in an effort to undo what sin has done, and to recover the state of things which sin has destroyed. It is a war designed to annihilate whatever would prevent us from doing unto others as we would they should do unto us; and whatever would hinder that devotion to the glory of God, which the wonders of the divine perfections, and the abundance of the divine mercies, so loudly demand. View the conflict of the enlightened believer from any point, or in any combination, and this will be found to be its sum. This is a statement which will not be questioned for a moment, except by persons who deny the authority of the word of God, or by those who, while professing to receive the Bible as a revelation from heaven, betray a marvellous ignorance as to the first principles of its doctrine.

The correctness of this representation must, we conceive, be evident on its comparison with the account which Paul has given of the conflicts that were frequently recurring in his own mind. In the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he writes, *For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I*

allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

From the various writings of this apostle, and from his known character and conduct, it is evident that the principles and affections which ruled within him were good and not evil; that, as the servant of Jesus Christ, *sin had not dominion over him*. The great lesson conveyed by the passage just cited, is, that the conflict in the experience of the believer is one arising from the fact of his being taught to delight in what is holy, just, and good; and that in the struggle which ensues between this new condition of his mind, and its remaining sinfulness, the advantages are not always on the better side. Nothing, however, can be more obvious, from the language of the apostle, than that the path of conflict is the path of duty. It decides at once, that to shrink from this course must be to proclaim an alliance with the opposites of holiness, justice, and goodness; yea, that in so doing, we take our place with those powers of darkness who are leagued in hostility to the designs of

that gospel by which the mercies of the Eternal in behalf of our race have been so wondrously manifested. To do this is not only to sin as the rebel angels did, in despising the goodness which had never failed to bless the obedient; but to sin as men only are capable of sinning,—setting at nought the mercy which has opened a path of salvation to the lost. There are many instances in scripture which seem to warrant the conclusion, that there is not another order of beings in the universe on whom the divine benevolence has expended so much of its treasure. On us, accordingly, there rests the heaviest weight of obligation that the Creator has laid upon the creature; and if we refuse to appear on the Lord's side in the great struggle between good and evil in the world, we not only attach to ourselves the guilt of rebellion, but of rebellion, the iniquity of which will probably be without a parallel in the history of depraved natures. This earth is the theatre on which the Creator has unveiled most of his beauty; and where the creature, if still retaining its enmity against him, must contract the greatest guilt, and merit the most signal punishment.

Thus in judging with regard to the guilt of those who refuse to submit themselves to the discipline and enterprise of the Christian warfare, we have to consider what the state is from which men are redeemed by the gospel, what the world is to which it would raise them, and what the means are through which this great salvation is

accomplished. Here the evil is infinite, and the good is infinite, and the medium through which our translation from the one to the other is effected, is in its worth infinite; and, according to the greatness of these, must be the greatness of our obligations.

It is not pretended that these sources of duty have nothing mysterious connected with them. The existence of sin at all, and especially its existence to so great an extent, is a fact, which even when viewed in connexion with the work of redemption, must confound all our reasonings and conjectures the more it is examined. But the existence of sin is unquestionable; and that a remedy, however partially applied, has been provided against it, is the belief of all Christians. Men may have formed very different conclusions as to the nature of the malady, and about the proposed remedy;—but shall we neglect what the scriptures teach concerning the one or the other, because the things affirmed of them are liable to these different interpretations from being in some respects above our comprehension? This would be a much greater folly than that of a sick man, who should determine not to credit the judgment of his physician, nor to adopt his prescriptions, until he shall himself be sufficiently acquainted with the science of medicine to be assured that the judgment delivered is strictly accurate, and the prescriptions founded upon it such as have the evident promise of efficiency. For what is the difference

between the discernment of the most learned physician and that of the humblest patient, as to medical science, compared with that which must divide between the knowledge of man and that of his Maker on the momentous questions of good and evil? Shall we presume to put our faint perceptions, our worse than slumbrous feelings, on such matters, into comparison with infinite intelligence and purity? Enough is known, in regard to such things, to make the path of duty plain; and the man who will not learn respecting them in a spirit of teachableness at his Maker's feet, may not belong to the sensual or the covetous; but as surely as the passions of such men have little influence upon him, there must be in him the elements of that proud nature which first lifted up itself against the supremacy of the Most Holy.

III. It has been intimated that the course which we are thus required to pursue from a sense of duty, should be not a little attractive to us from the Excellence of its Objects. These are such, considered in THEIR OWN NATURE, as to be worthy of our utmost effort; and they exceed all other objects, inconceivably, in their duration.

It is one of the Saviour's admonitions, that the life of man does not consist *in the abundance of the things he may possess*. Did it so consist, the most opulent, the most mighty, the most intellectual, would invariably be the most happy in themselves, and the most honoured of their Maker. But we

see the reverse of such consequences generally attendant on such distinctions. Wealth, and power, and fame, and pleasure,—these are all things of which men may possess themselves, and still be devoid of life : — our meaning is, that in the midst of this kind of abundance they may be aliens from that state of mind which is strictly necessary to their well-being ; — the term ‘ life ’ being used by the Redeemer, in the passage we have quoted, as referring, not to existence itself, but to its true ends—to our improved capabilities of dignity and blessedness. The love of external things may increase with the possession of them. Every new acquisition, instead of conferring satisfaction, may produce a greater restlessness, and place the mind at a continually increasing distance from happiness. The eye is not satisfied with seeing ; and the heart is often as little capable of saying ‘ It is enough,’ amid the largest accumulations of external good.

In all the gradations of society we see the same passions at work, slightly varied in their manner of development by the difference of circumstances. With respect to a large number, it is evident that the more they have laboured, and the more they have obtained, the more have they become estranged from their promised rest. It may be said that there are not a few exceptions to this rule—men who, possessing moderate means, are therewith content. But there are many little things which frequently serve to show that the contentment of such persons is more apparent than real ;

and it is to be remembered, that were these limitations of desire as manifest and as complete as they are said to be, an immortal being, content to live in unmindfulness of his immortality, must be, at best, a pitiable creature. The ardent passions of the former class, may lead them into many foolish and hurtful lusts, and at length to perdition; while the feebler nature of the latter, may allow them to sink to the level of those who would almost seem to have been created for no higher end than to be troubled about *what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed*. Often the whole secret of such instances of contentment as we have now adverted to, consists in the fact, that it is found much easier to luxuriate than to labour. The language of moderation is assumed, because it would be a greater sacrifice of selfishness to seek the increase of present wealth, than to live in the enjoyment of what is secured; and a course of life, which really proceeds from no better source than a proneness to indolent self-indulgence is often applauded as virtuous, and sometimes as religious!

Now one great advantage of the course in which the Christian is called to labour is, that it does not take from these worldly matters anything of their real value, nor prohibit a proper use of them. There is nothing evil in such things as power, or fame, or wealth, considered in themselves. The believer is not required to look on such gains as worthless; but simply to use them, should they

become his, according to the injunctions of the gospel, remembering that these injunctions have been framed by infinite wisdom and compassion, so as to render these things tributary, as far as they may be, to his own welfare, and to the Divine glory. The gospel does not tell him that his outward estate is a matter of no consideration ; but it does tell him that it is a matter of small moment compared with the state of his soul. It does not insist that he should abstain from seeking, or from using, the richest gifts in heaven's treasury ; but it does insist that these should be so sought, and so used, that they may conduce to the Divine honour in his salvation, and not to his destruction. It does not teach that the earth has no value ; but it affirms that heaven is far better.

Thus it is the design of the gospel to enable us to derive good from present things, avoiding much of the evil attaching to them ; and, at the same time, to raise our mind to the unseen and eternal, as to the objects before which our deepest homage should be paid, to which our strongest love should be given, and on which our dearest hopes should be placed. It proposes nothing less than that our understanding may find its great employment in the contemplation of His nature and ways who is the *Only wise* ; and that all our susceptibilities of love or hatred, hope or fear, joy or grief, may be regulated by that *good and perfect will of God*, which confers the Divine image and blessedness on all who are fully conformed to it. And what are

the loftiest achievements of human genius now, compared with that state of pure intelligence to which the humblest believer must soon be raised ? And what are those feverish pleasures which beguile us here for so short a season, in comparison with that joy unspeakable and full of glory, which is sometimes the lot of the believer even on earth, and must be his for ever in heaven ? The gospel looks not to mere circumstances, but to the man ; and its aim is to do a work upon the nature of man which must infinitely transcend whatever might possibly be done with regard to his external condition. It would make him rich ; but it is with a treasure of which no spoiler can deprive him, which no rust may corrupt. It would raise him to a place among the splendid and the powerful ; but it is to the splendour and the power of those whose greatness consists in their nearness to the Eternal, and whose thrones are set up in heaven. It would make them wise ; but it is with wisdom from above : and it would lead them to rivers of pleasure ; but it is to rivers which flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Surely that warfare, the effect of which is to raise our poor nature from its ruins, and thus to ennoble it again ; which can render even our polluted earth none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven, may well be attractive to us on account of the excellence of its objects.

Nor must we forget, that while the objects which the Christian soldier has in view are thus transcen-

dant in their nature, there is a DURATION assigned to them which raises them above all other objects in a manner which no language can describe, and which the Infinite Mind can alone understand. It is the restoration of the Divine image, and of that image as never to be effaced, or in the slightest degree sullied. It is, in consequence, the possession of complete happiness, and of that happiness as never to be invaded, in the smallest measure, by its opposite. It is to be admitted to the Paradise of God, and to go no more out for ever. It is to be possessed of everlasting light, and beauty, and strength, and gladness. In life, when all things else may fail us, these spiritual blessings never fail. In death, where every other stay must be insufficient, these are all-sufficient. In the day of doom, when all that earth contains shall be burnt up, these will only begin to be fully ours. In eternity, they shall progress, and bear new fruits, that the worship of heaven may be a lowlier worship, and that the utterance of its praises may clothe the redeemed with a lovelier brightness, and fill them with a more amazing joy. Well may the Christian exclaim—*The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places, I have a goodly heritage.*

IV. A further consideration, which should induce an immediate and earnest pursuit of these surpassing benefits, is the Certainty of Obtaining them, if they are duly sought. If required to betake ourselves to a path of much difficulty and

danger, we not only insist on being assured that the end proposed in doing so is good, and worthy of so much toil and hazard ; but, before committing ourselves to it, we must see a prospect of success. And even when our movements have been regulated by the wisest circumspection, what is more common than failure ? What language is more frequently reaching our ears from the lips of the worldly than that of disappointment ? Whether fame, or wealth, or pleasure, be the pursuit, and in whatever direction these may be sought, how few among the many who hope to succeed are really successful ? Every path is crowded with competitors, multitudes seeking what a few only can possibly obtain. Men labour all their life long to get gain ; and die in poverty. They plan, and strive, in the hope of becoming distinguished, or powerful ; and find their lot in obscurity and contempt. Indulging an easy faith, they look onward to many a scene of earthly enjoyment, only to learn, as they approach the enchanted ground, that, instead of gazing on realities, they have been fascinated by the creations of their own fond hopes.

An attempt to prove that this deceptiveness and uncertainty are thus intimately connected with earthly pursuits, or to make it plain that the false anticipations and vexatious failures adverted to, belong, with slight modifications, to every section of the human family, would be an effort to demonstrate what every man must, more or less, see and feel to be true. Hence, could we persuade

ourselves that successful worldliness is inseparable from perfect happiness, it is clear that this is a state which a few only are permitted to realize. In this case, the course before us must be one in which the chances, so to speak, must be fearfully against us—one in which crowds appear whose fallen and shattered state must serve to multiply our own probabilities of failure; while nothing can be descried, beyond a scattered remnant a little more fortunate, to afford the least ground of hope, that we may not be found to labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought. Thus, could we attach to worldly prosperity a value much greater than has ever been found in it, or even claimed for it, this chilling uncertainty might well teach us to wish that some path to happiness were discovered, where, instead of this abounding mockery, those who seek may find.

Such a path has been discovered. Of that narrow way in which the Christian soldier is maintaining his warfare, we have to affirm, that, in addition to its being the only way that can possibly lead to the true ends of human existence, it is the only one in which there is the certainty of success. The worldly *may* succeed, the Christian *must*. Believers are *kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation*. He who began *the good work in them will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ*. They may be conducted through a multitude of changing scenes; but this ever-varying complexion of the present has a constant and intimate reference to

the unalterable arrangements of the future. The forgiveness of their sins, their growth in grace, and their ultimate admission to the mansions of the blessed,—these have all the certainty which the promise and the oath of the Eternal can impart to them. *I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

FINIS.

By the same Author,

I.

The **LIFE and OPINIONS of JOHN DE WYCLIFFE**, D.D. Illustrated principally from his unpublished Manuscripts, with a Preliminary View of the Papal System, and of the State of the Protestant Doctrine in Europe to the Commencement of the Fourteenth Century. With a finely engraved Portrait by E. Finden, from the original Picture by Sir Antonio More, now an Heir-loom to the Rectory of Wycliffe, Richmondshire. Two Vols. 8vo. Second Edition, much improved. Price 1*l.* 1*s.*

"We feel indebted to Mr. Vaughan for having rolled away from English protestantism the reproach of indifference to this its great confessor, and for enabling the future historian and philosopher, both to analyse the mental phenomena that mark the extraordinary course of this Reformer, and to confute the gratuitous aspersions upon his character and opinions. —In Mr. Vaughan, Wycliffe has found an historian whose diligence has left no source of intelligence unexamined, and whose own stores of information upon ecclesiastical history and antiquities have contributed materially to illustrate his age and sentiments."—*Church of Ireland Magazine*.

"A work on the scale of that before us was a desideratum. The chasm is now supplied. Mr. Vaughan has executed his task with learning, sagacity, and spirit, and with more impartiality than either of the preceding (Lewis, Gilpin) biographers."—*New Monthly Magazine*, Feb. 1829.

"Mr. Vaughan has written laboriously, ably, independently. Wycliffe's arguments and appeals are invariably brought forward in their own behalf. His works are given, both in dissection and in liberal detail, and are thus made more accessible to the general reader than they would have been in their original form."—*Eclectic Review*.

"There seems to be no repository of ancient literature in the empire which has escaped the industry of Mr. Vaughan. To the labours of this gentleman I have great obligations to acknowledge. His diligence has enabled him to ascertain the date of many of Wycliffe's performances with an approach to precision which had never before been attained, and thus to trace out, with greater success than any former writer, the progress and development of the Reformer's convictions."—*Professor Le Bas. Rivingtons' Theological Library*.

II.

MEMORIALS of the STUART DYNASTY, including the Constitutional and Ecclesiastical History of England, from the Decease of Elizabeth to the Abdication of James II. Two Vols. 8vo. Price 1*l.* 4*s.*

"Of Mr. Vaughan's talents and acquirements as a writer, we have already spoken favourably in our notice of his elaborate work, 'The Life and Opinions of Wycliffe.' In the present volumes, we discover the same industry and research; the same prudence on doubtful or differently represented points; the same unyielding integrity; and the same elevated tone of patriotic and moral feeling, while, as a literary composition, we think the work before us is better executed."—*New Monthly Magazine*.

"Mr. Vaughan is the author of 'The Life and Opinions of Wycliffe,' a work remarkable for the qualities which will be found to distinguish the present performance,—research, clearness, and candour. There exists a large party in the country, who care little about the interests of sects or establishments, so that truth be got at and justice prevail. Among these, Mr. Vaughan will find some who will think that he has done the state some service. We can safely recommend the work as an able one,—the result of great industry and of deep conviction."—*Monthly Magazine*.

"This publication is entitled to our praise, both for its research, and its spirit of impartiality."—*Literary Gazette*.

"Mr. Vaughan has given a very fair and candid view of this period; and his remarks, always dictated by great liberality of sentiment, are worthy attentive perusal."—*Athenæum*.

"The noblest qualities which the historian can display, especially requisite on this portion of history, Mr. Vaughan possesses in a very high degree: his Memorials have evidently been compiled with the greatest care, at a vast expense of time and labour; and his service to the cause of truth will, we are persuaded, be proportionate."—*Congregational Magazine*.

III.

The **NATURE and DURATION of the PAPAL APOSTACY**. A DISCOURSE. Price 2*s.* 6*d.*







